

# 1993's IMAGINATION

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***Editor's Note:***

A slap in the face is most often mentioned when people are talking about bad (or a progressively bad) meeting with a guy and a girl. Most often, the dialog accompanying it goes something like this:

"No you jerk!" Insert slap.

"What did I say?"

However, a slap in the face isn't just limited to the physical concept. I've encountered many types of Slap-in-the-Face situations.

The best example I can think of is the reaction people get when they hear a type of music they've never heard before in their lives. Though the new craze has been dubbed alternative, I prefer to think of my music as the music of the decade. Not that any of the music is directly spawned from the '90's; most of the music wearing the alternative label have been in hiding for quite some time and have only recently become a public sound. Many have been inspired by '60's and '70's sounds. Either way, the music of the '90's is by no means the new. It's most old ideas revamped by people who liked the original stuff.

Anyways, people often react violently and or as if they have been slapped in the face when they listen to new music and or music they are not familiar with. I still remember my reaction to that teen anthem "Smells Like Teen Spirit," when my child-of-the-'80's mind listened to, "that crap!" (As some parents would call it.) I didn't particularly like it at first. I even called our local radio station as a joke and asked, "What does this Smells like teen spirit stuff mean anyway?" (By the by, they played the phone call on the air, getting me back for doing such a stupid thing.)

Now, however, I would have to admit that Kurdt and the gang are among my favorite bands, which includes an array of "alternative" bands from nine inch nails to They Might Be Giants. Often, people react as if they have been slapped in the face when they listen to my music, and the people who could care less are indeed my true friends.

Still, music isn't the only way to witness this transformation over people. Bringing home a girl or boyfriend creates similar reactions, just like when you see your teacher outside of school doing something that you could never picture them doing. Everyone can picture these things and most of us are familiar with these kind of Slap-in-the-Face experiences.

To the best of my ability, I've tried to make the run of this magazine a good, old fashioned, down home American, pseudo-gothic-punk, "My god, can he really do that in a magazine?", "Well, I guess he can," slap in the face. It wasn't easy. I had to scower the school for material, I had to stay up late brainstorming, I had to kill off innocent brain cells with too much coffee, and all of it was to give you a slap in the face, Austin Rich style.

Bob's Imagination wasn't just something I was doing in my spare time (just ask my girlfriend). Bob's was something special. It was the first magazine of its type in our school. It was aimed at breaking records and keeping them broken. It was aimed at students who probably had a little more to them than school spirit and good grades. Bob's was for us. For those who couldn't cope. For those who looked at the system, saw the flaws, and realized that there wasn't a whole hell of a lot they could do.

Bob's was a student magazine, plain and simple.

I received a new kind of slap in the face when I started Bob's. I realized that there was a job in my chosen profession. I found that there is life outside of my computer network, and a glowing, pulsing, "Wow, that was good," life at that. I saw people turn out some really good work when Bob's came about. (I also saw some bad, but I won't name any names Austin). I realized that Bob's wasn't really necessary; the art would flow through our school naturally. However, Bob's does tend to stimulate creativity.

Now, as I have to deal with the biggest slap in the face yet (getting kicked out of my house a few weeks before graduation), I submit this for your approval. A school filled with Imaginations. Students pouring out work into volumes bound any way they can. Art, writing of all types and color flowing through the school, opening eyes and slapping faces left and right. New magazines, underground and illegal, above ground and running through the school, and each filled with the life-blood of my culture--writing and art. I submit that it is possible, and I want you, all of you people who read this magazine, I want you to make it happen. Next year, I expect to have people sending

me magazines inspired by Bob's, filled with new art that is timeless. I expect all of you to fight the power and yell, "I feel gyped! I want my money back!"

Nahh, it'll never happen. Well, maybe that last part...

For those of you interested, due to a lack of time at our school (considering I graduate this year), I am now putting my position up on the rack, making it available to any who want it. It's tough, the hours suck, the pay is lousy, and there aren't that many benefits.

But, what the hell? That's what I always say.

Business before pleasure, right?

It appears that collaboratively two identification errors were made on several pieces of art. First off, in the second issue on page 39 a picture identified as being drawn by Brandon Burkeen was not entirely drawn by him. It was a collaborative effort with Sid Burgdorf, a good friend long since moved away. In addition to that, two art pieces on pages 7 and 48 were credited to Adam Jenks when they were actually drawn by Jeremy Clark. I just wanted to clear things up.

The cover art by Devin Miller has quite a bit in it if you look hard enough. A complete listing of what is in it can be found in the back of the magazine (page 48) if you're interested.

The unfortunate circumstances that have arisen have made turnout for the Shortest Short Story nil. With the exception of about five entries which didn't quite qualify, no one else submitted short stories. Until further notice, the contest is postponed. However, we are still going to accept submissions, so keep 'em coming.

Which is a good time to mention Bob's future. School is over, and Bob's Imagination in the format that you are now reading will not be seen. However, I plan to still edit a magazine. Those of you who have read the Annex received a small taste of what the new magazine will be like. However, it will probably cost about \$1.50 an issue, and submitters will not be able to get free copies. Hey, life's a beach, but I need to finance the magazine myself. Anyone who is interested in the new magazine (the name has yet to be chosen) contact me in the usual ways.

It is unfortunate, but none of the stories that we said would be continued can be in this issue. Due to the quick publication of this I didn't have much time to get the submissions from them, and because of my unfortunates events Buck and I could write Spare-O. If you are interested in reading the full versions of any story that was not preprinted in its entirety, contact the author and make arrangements with them. As for Practical Applications Of Infinity, Job Opportunity, and Adrian, they will be continued from where they were left off in this issue in our next magazine.

Now, here's a note from my anonymous cohort:

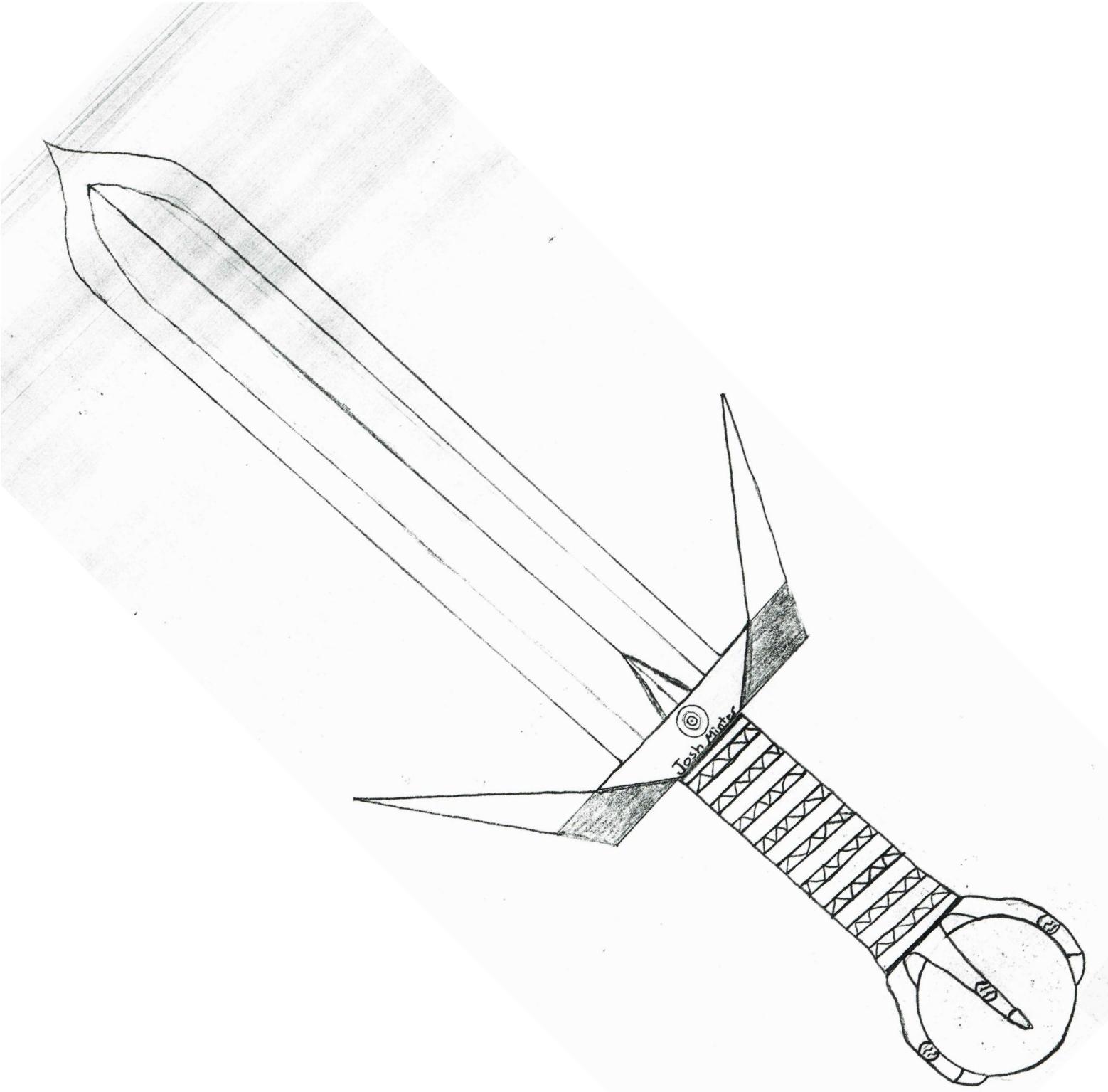
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Hello, it's me, the anonymous cohort. Due to circumstances I am not immediately prepared to deal with, I won't be working on an editor's note to be put in the Imagination, though I had planned on it. For the editor's note that would have gone there please see the Annex. I don't think the editor's note would have been found appropriate. If you don't get an Annex please borrow it from someone who does. I really think you should read it.

| ----- |

It's been a really great four issues. I hope to see all the faces that were in the magazine when the new one rolls around. Life wouldn't be the same without you. Until next time, this is Austin Rich, and I am... well, you know.

**This issue is dedicated to our girlfriends, Melissa Cooper and Chantal Angot, from whom we learned the patience needed to deal with life in general**



*Special Thanks To:*

A.C.R.O.N.Y.M. for their support,  
The Bob's Imagination Staff (That means all of you out there),  
The Bob's Annex Staff (All two of us),  
Justin Anderson (and, in the future, anyone else who will let me crash on their couch and buy me coffee),  
Uncle Tupelo ("No Depression." Yeah, right. P.S. Sorry I stole your quote.),  
All the bands in my tape box (to quote a famous sage, "you know who you are"),  
Merri McCausland (and her computer Robin),  
And my cohort and co-editor, who was there when I needed him the most. Thanks.

## Bob's Imagination

### Contents:

Knife Drawing by <i>Josh Minter</i>	"Special Thanks Page"	
Sunny Vale by <i>Becky Munsell</i>	1	
Cinderella's Silence II: <i>The Muteness Broken</i> by <i>an anonymous author</i>	1	
Insomnia by <i>Damon Brice</i>	2	
Insomnia II by <i>Damon Brice</i>	2	
Problems by <i>Melissa Cooper</i>	3	
SHIFT by <i>Robbie Wolfard</i>	3	
An ode against prejudice by <i>Tasha Renee Lavelle</i>	3	
A Twist of Destiny: Bottled War III by <i>Chris R. DeLay</i>	4	
How to Catch Z's by <i>Robert Clark</i>	4	
My Secret Kingdom by <i>Chantal Angot</i>	5	
Adrian Part III by <i>Austin Rich</i>	6	
Map Drawing by <i>R. Stephen Howard</i>	9	
Through Every New Door by [ ]-[] (Un-Pseudonymed)	12	
▲▲		
▼▼		
THE ULTIMATE WORD SEARCH by <i>Tim Hadley</i>	14	
The Tapestry Chair by <i>Camile Lawson</i>	14	
One Rainy Night by <i>an anonymous author</i>	16	
Rails By Night by <i>Wendy D. Fuller</i>	17	
Drawing by <i>R. Stephen Howard</i>	18	
Sleepless Nights by <i>Josh Minter</i>	19	
Condemned by <i>Damon Brice</i>	20	
Thunderstorms by <i>Tim Hadley</i>	20	
Good-bye To Love by <i>Amy sperling</i>	20	
Reason by <i>Damon Brice</i>	20	
Late Night Deliveries by <i>Kelly Ballance</i>	21	
The Temptation by <i>D. O'Dorant</i>	22	
That Sunday That Summer by <i>Becky Erbes</i>	22	
Frogs In My Eyes by <i>Aaron Danielson</i>	25	
Ruins drawing by <i>Devin Miller</i>	27	
Déjà Vu: The End (?) by <i>Austin Rich</i>	28	
April 28th Hadley's Woods by <i>Tim Hadley</i>	30	
Job Opportunity Chapter Two by <i>Devin Miller</i>	32	
PRACTICAL APPLICATIONS OF INVINITY Chapter Three & Four by <i>Damon Armitage</i>	34	
Drawing by <i>Devin Miller</i>	37	
The Lilipad Incident, Three Miles From Civilization,		
	Right After Lunch by <i>Austin Rich</i>	38
Hate by <i>Justin Anderson</i>	38	
Art by <i>Rob Villa and Nathan Clark</i>	39	
.UnChanged by <i>Robbie Wolfard</i>	39	
Childhood by <i>Austin Rich</i>	40	
Psychos, Anonymous by <i>Austin Rich</i>	40	
Bob's Imagination Alternate Cover by <i>Ron Horner</i>	46	
Editors Closing Notes by <i>anonymous co-hort &amp; Austin Rich</i>	47	
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Cover Art by <i>Tim Russel (Front Cover), Devin Miller (Back Cover), &amp; Un-Pseudonymed (Inside Covers)</i>		
Cover Design, Art & Text Layouts by <i>Austin Rich</i>		

**Sunny Vale**  
by Becky Munsell

Looking at the sterile, white halls, the quite subdued corridors and wards, anyone would think that Sunny Vale was just like any other hospital on the planet. Orderlies and nurses go about their business calmly and quietly, silently sidestepping doctors with their white coats and metal clipboards, with rarely more than a nod.

Anyone would assume that Sunny Vale's wards were filled with the hurt and the sick, the wounded and the dying, new mothers and new babies, maybe cancer patients and those recovering from physical trauma.

Sunny Vale has none of these things.

Behind the closed doors of the long silent corridors, lying in sterile beds or sitting in sterile chairs are those members of society that can no longer cope with reality and/or the people who inhabit it.

Sunny Vale is a psychiatric institute.

The people that fill the wards are sick, but not like you would think, they are hurt, but only by themselves and only in their minds. If they are wounded, it is because the attendant nurse or orderly let his or her guard drop for a moment, and if they are dying it is their soul and mind that fades. The only new mothers here are the mothers of babies that never existed or those that were driven insane by the death of their baby. There are no new babies here, except those that exist in the imaginations of those committed, voluntarily and involuntarily alike. No cancer patients are here; the only physical trauma people suffer is from the long wear on the body that chemical imbalances sometimes cause.

Sunny Vale has all of **these** things.

And I should know. I write these words from a sterile chair that is seated by a sterile desk that is in a sterile room behind a closed sterile door in one of the sterile lower security wings. Every day I walk down the long, white, sterile hallways in sterile blue-gray pajamas. And every day I wonder why there aren't hurt or sick or wounded or dying people here. Why you can't look through a pain of plexi-glass and see a dozen tiny plastic beds each containing an equally tiny baby that cries and awaits its mother's touch.

But then I look up from the shiny, freshly waxed floor and just like every other day that is only a vague blotch on my deteriorating brain, I see the wire mesh on the inside of the windows and the bars on the out and I remember that Sunny Vale has all of these things.

But, like the doctors say, they're only in our minds.

What I wouldn't give to have a mind that no longer needed to be sterilized.

| ----- |

**Cinderella's Silence II**  
**The Muteness Broken**  
by an anonymous author

In his final moments as the humanity was drained from him, he looked around to catch a small peripheral sight of a hairline fracture in the unblemished surface lining the interior of this structure. Thinking about a possible way to increase the intensity of this separation, the laceration sealed itself, denying the intruder of any escape.

Although the entity in charge of this seduction had a grasp of his physical being, his sentience was left intact. Although the victim had always been considered intellectually advanced and had extreme understanding of the human psyche and his own personal cogitation, he was having difficulty controlling his thoughts. Focusing on a particular idea of moving, there was a slight alteration in his current habitations, revealing that there was a weakness in the entity that controlled his demise. He freed himself immediately from the immortal seize his captures had placed upon him.

Sizing up his surroundings, the half human half fluorescent figure began moving between what seemed like ice sculptures, but with a center made of flesh. The beating heart of the half transfigured creature showed through the transparent shell as a large red dot pulsing frantically. The figure could be likened to a premature infant still grasping for life through the mother's womb.

Unable to make any noise, the two ice creatures, both now shimmering and shifting, sized each other up. Realizing by staying separated they could not escape, they both held out their hands and made contact.

She peered through the old cloudy window, weathering the agonizing heat and humidity. This house had always appeared to have a strange outlandish landscape. The house itself was made of stucco painted with an off-white. The roofing was a rust colored tiling, a common sight in Southern Florida. Along the streets there were rows and rows of almost identical Santa Fe looking establishments, but this one, this one was different. As with every tract house there were similarities. For this house, though, the common threshold was somewhat unnoticeable, yet it maintained its familiarity. It was unusually rundown for such a high class neighborhood. She noticed from the window that the inside of the house was lined with pastel carpeting, including an oddly placed staircase.

The two entities moved toward the wall. One touched it and the same cascade of light fell over it.

Outside because of the force of the presence, the woman was pushed back after witnessing this event from the house window.

Again the vortex appeared on the inside of the chasm. The figure standing outside the house began to move forward to get another glance. In resting her hand on the window sill, trying to support her weight, she fell through the vortex into immediate captivity, untransformed.

She became an odd sight in the crystalline room. In that brief moment before she had been forced back, she realized she had seen a glimpse of this, but hadn't put it into place until now. Feeling no pain, she carefully moved forward toward the two stooped figures in the distance. She spoke to them asking where she was. Their movements seemed to prove that they understood but were unable to reverberate. Her voice seemed to drown out the intense intonation of crashing and exploding sounds being released in the previously sealed room. She did not know that the appearance of her voice into the cacophony of sounds removed the horrific disturbance that had filled the chamber, for she didn't even hear herself. The ice creatures felt relieved until she had stopped talking because of their lack of response. She began to step away from them, unaware of what was behind her. She slid back through the wall out of sight of the creatures inside the chasm. She was once again in the extreme humidity of the tropical sun.

Inside the chasm the two organisms began to try to extrapolate what recently occurred between themselves. They moved toward the wall, hoping they could leave as well. Again as they touched the wall, it began to glow again, almost blinding them. As the light pierced their vision, they fell back against the floor.

Another of the organisms that had just been freed moved toward the vortex. As the creature became engulfed in light, the small red pulse of the creature's heat disappeared, as did the creature. The vortex closed revealing nothing, as if it had never appeared. In studying the area more closely, the remaining creatures discovered a small place in front of another small crack, like before; there was a palate of a clear ice like residue smothering the threshold of the orifice. He touched the wall again and after the blinding effect another entity approached the saddened creature from behind. Another companion stuck in a horrid rat's maze. A vortex appeared and then faded with time. Trapped.

The End!

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### **Insomnia** by Damon Brice

There's a full moon tonight.  
I went to the window  
And gazed out at nothing-  
Except the eerie silence  
and the pure radiance  
from the crystal sky.

I touched the cold windowpane  
And it reminded me  
Of the icy emptiness  
In my soul as I watched  
You dance in my memory.

Did you ever know something & not know why or how?

### **Insomnia II** by Damon Brice

Sheets of rain drum relentless  
upon the midnight dreamscape--  
Drenching, Quenching the earth  
Through the incessant deluge; it is  
A purging of the heavens.

I turn my gaze upward  
And as for an instant I feel  
The silver rivulets run down  
My cheeks, I revel in the storms  
without, finding peace within.

## Problems

by Melissa Cooper

All my life, I've known what to do  
Always had the answer  
Now, I haven't a clue

The problems keep piling  
Upon my shoulders  
And yet I keep smiling

The only words I know  
Are soothing nothings  
But there troubles won't melt, like  
snow

One new concern, on top of another  
Compacting the old  
Creating new brothers

Only time seems the answer  
Nothing to do now, but wait  
Wait for life to come closer.

## SHIFT

by Robbie Wolfard

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Did Elvis talk to you,  
Or was it just a dream,  
Living in your fantasy world,  
Seeing while you scream,  
The omniscient feeling I'm getting from you,  
Is not too far away,  
going down aisle 12  
and eating ice-cream,  
dogs and Martians on the moon,  
soup upon my lap,  
why did you have to  
kill the dog and cat,  
shadows on the ceilings,  
blood upon the snow,  
I'm sorry that I had to say,  
that I had to go.

## An ode against prejudice

by Tasha Renee Lavalle

Roll of Thunder hear my cry!

My cry is great fear  
and sadness  
I may have lied  
I may have been a fool  
at times

Is this an excuse for you to be  
*prejudiced*  
of me

I know why!

It's because my skin is black  
Is this why I am treated like an  
*Animal*

*Look!*

I have cut open my black skin  
What color is the blood that is coming out  
*Tell me!! What color is this blood??!*  
Look me in the eyes and tell me  
it's not the same as yours

*I am so tired of this!*

I get whipped for speaking my own word  
I can't walk on the same  
street as you  
I work for nothing  
You hand me down you're old books  
*Why do I not get the best*

*I am treated like an animal!!*

God created me with a different color  
and I'm proud  
Christ died for us all  
Not just for Whites  
You're not better than God  
so why should I care about  
how you judge.

*Soon*

I will be in paradise  
Your blood is red  
and my blood is red  
Is it not the same!!  
If you shall judge by color  
*Look a little deeper  
and judge me now!!*

## A Twist of Destiny: Bottled War III

by Chris R. DeLay

Our swords clash; the cacophany drowns out the warnings.  
Someone wants Him to defeat me.  
They tell Him where I am vulnerable, weak, direct His weapon to my vital areas.  
I parry, but His blows continue to rain down with increasing strength and accuracy.  
I am bleeding, yet I continue.

He stops for a moment, turns His head for more instructions.  
With all my might, I charge forth with my cold steel.  
My sword finds its mark, and I impale Him without mercy.  
He gurgles forth His pain, giving me an unsatiable bloodlust.  
I wrench my blade, and he falls. I stand victorious.

I rush forth to receive my prize, the princess I so deeply love.  
I have waged an impossible war, and won, all for her.  
I have dispatched God's strongest ally.  
Striding forth, I gather my wits about me. I am injured, but I'll live.  
I can't be blathering fool in front of the woman I so deeply desire.  
I lower my guard.

The defeated one rises, healing without effort.  
He draws a hidden dagger, and stabs me through the heart.  
A cruel smile draws itself from His mouth.  
The wound is mortal, but I must live.  
She needs me; she is naked without me to protect her guide her.  
I remove the instrument of my death from my body.  
I recognize it; it is the very first gift I gave her.  
Could she? Why? Why would she hurt the one who loves her most?

Everything fades to black. The only thing I sense is nothingness.  
Pure, absolute, nothingness.  
I arrive at Heaven's gates, where God himself awaits.  
I tell him, proudly yet humbly, of my accomplishments.  
He asks why I should live.  
“Love, your highness. Your greatest gift to Mankind,” I say, tears flooding my dead eyes as I remember Rachael.  
God points towards a grey mist, and bids me towards it.  
I approach, and gaze in. Rachael is there. It is a portal back.  
“Search your heart, my son. You may go back if your hearts can be as one.”  
I step into the portal.

| ----- |

## How to Catch Z's

by Robert Clark

The myth of the Z butterfly is a myth that all scientists have tried to prove is not a myth at all, but is actually something real. They always failed. There are five ways they tried to catch Z's. Now let's go deep into their computer files to find these ideas they used. Let's start with number 2.

2. This scientist says that he tried to catch Z's by pretending to be asleep. He says that he was soon very asleep. So as we can see this scientist didn't do very well. Let's go to number 4.

4. This one did something a little different for the last one. She used a specially made box for her experiment. She closed herself in the box and went to sleep. She then says that when she woke up she saw the Z's flying around her in the box. She opened the box to get a jar and the Z's got away. So next time she tries to catch Z's, she should put a jar in the box first. Let's go to number 3.

3. Number 3 seems to have done the same as number 2. They guy went to bed pretending to be asleep. He also fell asleep, but he had a little more success. He says that when he woke up, he pretended to still be asleep. What he saw before him made him stop his pretending. He writes saying that Z's have wings of silver, eyes of gold, and they seem to float on the air instead of fly. Let's read number 1.

1. Number 1, or the first to try to catch a Z. This person doesn't say if they're a he or a she. They do say that they have seen Z's before. They say that Z's cannot be described. This person speaks as if from experience. Their writing is very old and has an accent to it. Now for the last experience.

5. I like to save the best for last. This guy is a real joker. He wrote his paper to make fun of everyone else. He says that the only way to catch Z's is to go to sleep and dream of catching Z's. When he did that he says that he had a jar full of them. When he opened the jar to take one out they all got away. He writes that if anyone catches a Z to keep it in a glass case and never open the case up even if the Z looks dead, for Z's are immortal beings.

My conclusion is that if you believe in something, it comes true for you. So if anyone ever believes in this story, then I had better find a new job. I still hope you liked this story for its originality. Have a nice day and don't believe what is in this story. Or you may find yourself in a place you don't want to be. That means that you might end up on the funny farm, if you go and say that you've seen Z's... You know what I mean, don't you? So don't go and say that you've seen Z's, because you haven't. Good bye and have fun.

| ----- |

## MY SECRET KINGDOM

by Chantal Angot

I remember a time when the world was my kingdom. A time when adventure lurked behind every closed door. When imagination made everything possible and I believed dreams could come true. A time when a house dog became an enchanted dragon and a young girl could be a knight.

"Bonnie," I called as I dashed out the back door of our house. I was quickly met by my best friend Bonnie, the very friendly family mutt. She wagged her shaggy tan tail and raced ahead of me, already aware of our destination.

I watched Bonnie for a while before starting across the field myself. Only a short way ahead of me, she had already found a butterfly to play with, jumping up and down in excitement when it came near. I laughed at the silly dog and soon decided to follow her for she was already over halfway there. I ran as fast as I could to reach my destination: my castle, an old and very large fir tree just at the edge of our property. It was the best place for a castle, I thought. The tree stood high, towering above most of the others in the immediate vicinity. Its lower branches grew out and then toward the ground to create a canopy. Falling from the branches was a grey moss that seemed to hide the tree in a protective covering.

"Here Bonnie," I called as I reached the tree. The large dog walked up to me much calmer than she had been just moments before. Bonnie stayed beside me almost ceremoniously as we entered through the branches.

I ran to the center of my enchanted castle, then to my throne. All the while I was followed by my mentor, Boe the magical dragon. When I had reached my seat of honor, I pulled from beside me a long sword made of the finest silver and decorated with various precious gems.

"I slay thee Sir Boe," I said as I gently poked at the dragon with my sword. Boe slowly cowered away.

"Just kidding, crazy dragon."

Cautiously Boe made her way back to her post. "Today we shall meet with a messenger from the marsh," I explained to the dragon in such an excited tone that she forgot about her duty. We ran around our castle singing and dancing, all the while keeping a close watch out for the long awaited messenger. I swung my sword in the air

playfully jabbing at invisible warriors. Boe stayed close by my side prancing and occasionally jumping out of the way of my constantly waving sword.

Suddenly Boe froze, she didn't move except to sniff the air (dragons are good at smelling things). I looked at Boe, her expression told me that the messenger had arrived.

Just then a large brown rabbit darted out from under the branches of my castle. "Our messenger," I yelled to Boe, "Get him before he escapes!" The rabbit ran under the far branches and was already in the field before we caught sight of him again. Boe, being quite fast for a dragon, was ahead of me, but even she couldn't catch up with our messenger.

I started to run faster, slowly gaining on the dragon, though still losing sight of the messenger. "Faster, Boe," I panted, but soon the rabbit was out of view. Even though our messenger was gone, we continued to run. We ran for the joy of running, for the feel of the wind on our faces and the soft grassy field beneath our feet.

Our pace soon slowed until we were lying on the ground. I giggled in happy exhaustion and we stared up at the sky. Looking up I saw puffy people and animals all staring down at me. How strange it would be, I thought to live in the sky and look down on myself looking up at me. I wonder if there is a little girl and her best friend like us up there looking down wondering if there, too, is someone out there just like them.

Suddenly I woke to the all familiar feel of a wet dog tongue on my face.

"Bonnie," I snarled more playful than angry. She jumped to the side, then perked up her ears in an evident challenge. I leaped in to the air at once and was after her. She ran and swerved, always staying just inches away from my grip. Finally, I managed to grab ahold of her, and we both tumbled to the ground. Our game of tag was suddenly a wrestling match. No one ever really won, and we eventually ended as friends. We walked to a stream not far away for a drink of water.

The stream was the biggest of many that flowed across the field where we played, and in some spots was deep enough to swim in.

"Last one in is a rotten egg," I called as I took off once again across the field. Bonnie stayed close at my heels until we dove almost simultaneously into the clear water. We swam for the duration of the day, then together we walked toward home.

On the way home, we stopped on a small hill and watched the sunset together. The mixed hues of pink and blue swirled together in the sky making some of the deepest and most beautiful shades of purple I've ever seen. It was growing quite dark, so we got up and slowly made our way home.

I recently returned to the house I grew up in. I visited the creek and walked in the field. Then I started towards my tree. Halfway to my old tree I remembered one place I wanted to visit first. Walking between some trees I finally came upon a very faded trail and followed it to a small clearing.

In the clearing was a worn wooden cross. Carved in to the wood was the name "Bonnie." This is where my childhood had ended; the place where I said good bye to my last dragon and buried my best friend.

| ----- |

### Adrian by Austin Rich

#### **Part III.**

It was cold and dark afternoon. Fall had set in, and winter was a few weeks away. The sun was still out, but not enough to brighten the dreary day. School had gotten out about thirty minutes ago, and a little girl, about nine, was on her way home. She stopped several times to talk to her friends and play a while. It was okay. Nothing was going to happen to her today. She was safe.

When she got home the lights were on, and she could see her mom in the light through the window. Her boyfriend was there too. They were kissing. The little girl decided to go in the back door, so as not to disturb them. She went into the kitchen, got a glass of milk, and ate some cookies. "You're going to spoil your dinner, little girl."

"Mom," she said, in that daughter voice that all little girls use to complain to their mothers.

"Please, Harold and I are going out tonight, and I want you to eat your dinner when the sitter gets here. And don't pull any of the stuff you pulled last time. You're lucky you were only grounded from the TV for two weeks."

"But Mom," she whined.

"No buts. Now go upstairs and wash up. The sitter will be here soon."

She did what her mom said, just as she always did because she knew that things were going to be okay, because if she was lucky, she might get a new dad, soon.

She snuck downstairs late that night and decided that she was going to get some cookies anyway. This time she wasn't going to get caught. She made sure she was quiet. She went into the kitchen and looked around the corner to see if the sitter was going to be able to see her. Of course she wasn't, but someone else was. Harold and her mom were there, and the sitter was leaving. She was almost ready to go back upstairs, but she was curious. She watched closer. Then she realized what was going on after the sitter had left.

She couldn't hear what her mom or Harold said. She didn't have to, and she didn't want to. When Harold slapped her mom and hit her in the shoulder, she knew something was wrong. She was paralyzed with fear. Her mom tried to resist, but Harold was stronger, and was holding her arms. He yelled at her mom, loudly. She almost went out and tried to stop what was happening. But the verbal and physical abuse that her mom was receiving froze the muscles in her body. Then Harold forced her to leave. Harold just grabbed her mom, opened and slammed the door, and left the house. She was so scared she ran upstairs as fast as possible. She clenched her Mickey Mouse pillow tightly, and hoped and prayed that what she had seen was a bad dream. She tried to get to sleep, and through her tears and cries for help, she did.

She woke up that morning and prayed that what she had seen was going to be gone. She went downstairs, and to her surprise, she found nothing. Her mom wasn't there, and neither was Harold. She got scared again and just waited in the kitchen, reading her Mickey Mouse magazine, hoping Mom would walk in the door and say, "You're going to spoil your dinner, little girl."

But nothing happened.

And all day, nothing happened.

That night, she had gone through two bags of cookies and finished off the milk, and had read all the Mickey Mouse magazines she owned. She was very afraid when the sun went down. She was afraid of monsters, the ones called Harold.

That night she fell asleep on the couch and the police arrived. They said they had to take her somewhere safe, because her mommy wasn't coming back home. Not that day. She knew what it meant. Her mom was dead. It was when she finally said to the police, "She's dead, isn't she?" that her worst fears were confirmed: Harold had killed her.

That night she stayed at a foster home with lots of other kids. Some of them said their parents died; some of them said that they never knew their parents. But she was the only one that said her mom's boyfriend killed her mom. She tried to get the thought of what had happened out of her mind. But Harold was always there, looming over her, hitting her mother hard, yelling at her. She didn't sleep much that night, not a bit.

The next few days were the toughest. She eventually got her Mickey Mouse magazines, her only valuable possessions in her mind, but she still couldn't sleep for the longest time, and she often refused to eat without her cookies and milk. The other kids didn't want to play with her, and feared her. Things looked bad. And then they got worse.

When she was sixteen she was identified as HIV positive. Her medical records from her childhood were incomplete for some reason, and it was hard to know if she'd always had it or not. She didn't seem to care much that she was going to die. All she could think of was that it might be better than her life now. Things were really bad.

And then they got a little better.

It took a while though. After she had all but withdrawn from society, had become bitter and had a sour outlook on life. She rarely talked, and if she did it was some sarcastic remark. She decided that no one had tried to help her, so she would just help herself and leave everyone else alone. She needed help.

She got it too. In the bathroom, while she was washing her hands. She set the washrag down and went to look at herself in the mirror. She was afraid. She never told anyone, but she was afraid of a lot of things. Afraid of life, afraid of death, afraid of everything, and more.

The washrag moved slightly, and this caused her to jump back. "How could that have happened?" she thought. It was when the washrag began to speak that she thought it was some sort of joke that the other kids were playing on her. She decided to go along with it.

"My name is Haraq," the washrag said, in a friendly voice.

"Just call me dying," she said, in a sarcastic-little-girl voice.

"Are you serious?"

"Very serious. Dead serious." She laughed a gloomy little half laugh, one that one might laugh if they found out that the world was going to end, and you have to spend it watching a comedian.

"Then I might be of some assistance to you."

"What are you going to do, soak the illness out of me?"

"In a way, yes."

She perked up. She seemed to think he wasn't kidding. She said, slowly, "Who the hell are you? I'm sure you think this is really funny, but it's not, okay?"

"Who are you talking to?" the washrag asked.

"You, and you had better cut this joking around out, okay? I'm really not in the mood." With that she left the bathroom and returned to her room, insulted.

After she spent a few moments with her face down in the pillow, she heard a voice from behind her saying, "Does this mean you don't want me to help you?"

She swung around to see who it could be, and screamed at the washrag when she saw it.

"How the hell did you get in here?!"

"I unlocked the door," the washrag replied.

She just stared as it moved across the floor in disbelief. "How could you unlock the door when the lock is on the inside?"

"It is easy when you are of my race."

"You're telling me that there's an entire race of beings comprised of washrags?"

Haraq knew that this line of conversation was not going to get to where it needed to be, so he floated toward her face and said, "No. But I am of a race of beings in desperate need of help, in return for which I can help you."

For a moment, she had total sense of disbelief, and asked, "If you wanted to, could you really help me?"

"Indeed I could."

Reality began to set in. This was too weird. She was talking to a washrag for Christ's sake. She picked it out of the air and tried to find the strings, but couldn't.

"This has got to be a joke," she thought, but something told her it wasn't. She wasn't sure if she should get up and lock the door, and after a few moments of hesitation, she did. Then she continued the conversation by throwing the washrag down on her bed.

"First of all I want to make this clear," she snapped. "If you are some kind of prank pulled by any of these kids here, those kids are really going to regret it. And another thing, who... I mean what are you?"

"A perfectly logical question. I understand that conversing with a washrag happens about as often as nuclear holocausts do, but please understand that I am not a prank pulled on you. I am real, and I, too, am stuck somewhere I don't want to be. I think, if you help me, I can help you."

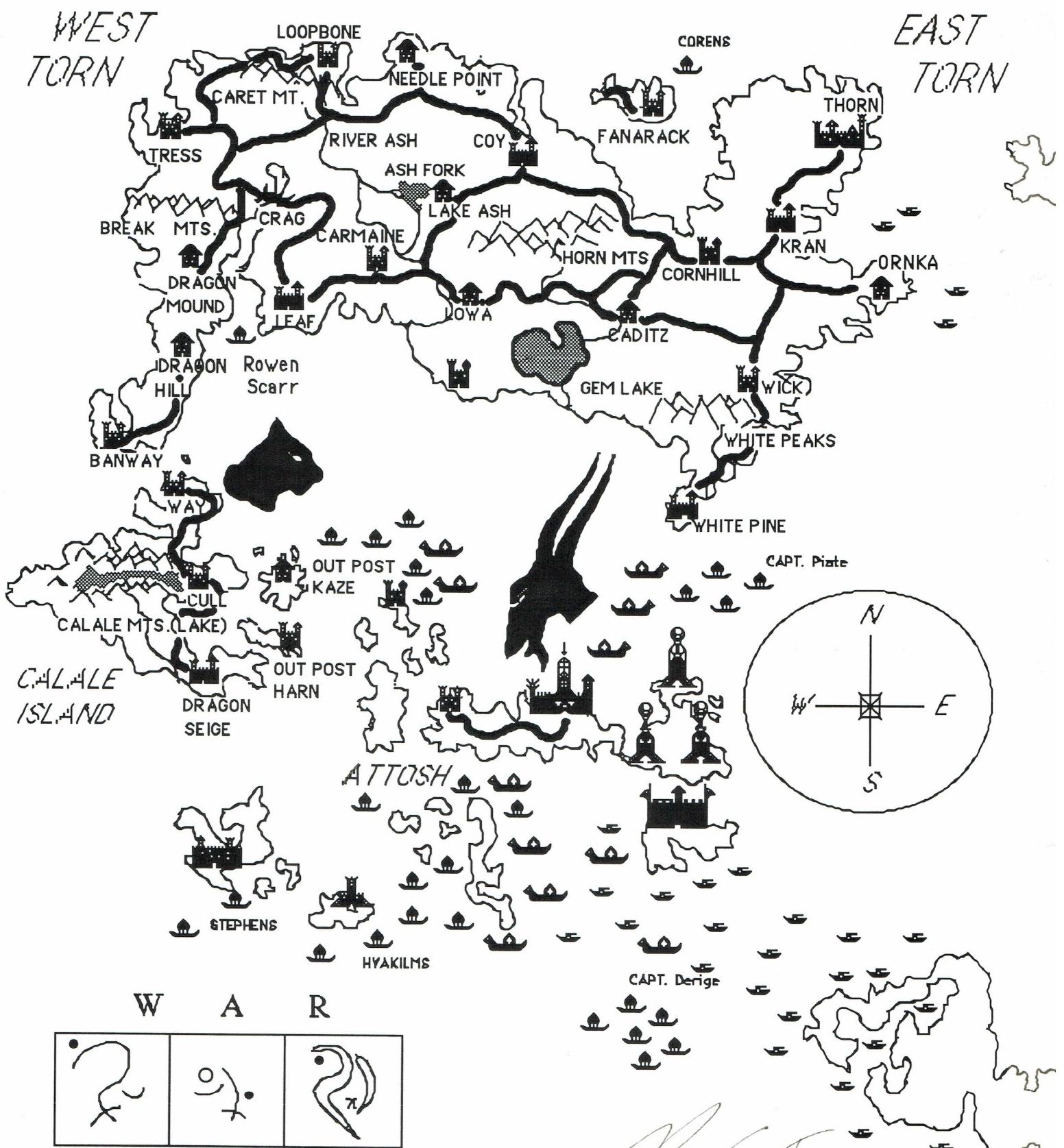
After a long pause, she said, "Let me hear your problem before you think about helping me. Besides, I don't see much that a washrag could do anyway."

"Whatever you say," was all he said.

\* \* \* \* \*

She began to see images. Like as if she were asleep. It was of another world, one beautiful and pleasant. This was definitely paradise. She sat and wondered how she had gotten there. Then she realized she wasn't sitting, she was floating. Then she saw Haraq, and she remembered the conversation with the washrag. Things were back in focus.

When she looked carefully, she noticed that Haraq was no longer a washrag. He was a bright colored nothingness that looked as if you could touch him, but your hand would pass through him if you did. He was pure energy now. But how did she know it was Haraq? Maybe it was some kind of subconscious beacon that would



Hellven Script

Ryan Howard

R. Steffan  
Howard

allow her to recognize him no matter where she was and what he looked like. Or maybe it was his friendly voice, impossible to forget.

As she watched, Haraq's voice became more and more clear, and she could hear him. She glanced around the place she was at, and it resembled what the energy being Haraq was. It was a reddish color, but almost looked paisley because it swirled around, almost as if it went back into itself in some places. The background was not that bright, and when you looked at it, you could tell that you could never touch it; you knew it stretched away into infinity. What Haraq was saying sounded extremely important, and she listened.

"Fellow Eronites. It has come to the high council's attention that our world, Eron, is not the only one in existence." Haraq waited for the audience to react. They stared back in anticipation, and he continued. "Believe it or not, there are places where mass has been given sentience, and that energy is nothing more than the lifeless workhorse of those worlds. We of the high council have decided that we should send a party of explorers to these worlds and realms, extend peace and tranquility, and offer to leave an ambassador there as a token of our friendship. We will need to have many volunteers on this quest, and some must be willing to stay as good will ambassadors in the realms and worlds we meet. All Eronites who think that they can handle this task meet the high council after I finish my speech. Thank you."

Haraq's speech was not that important to her, although she now knew what his world looked like and where he came from. She loved this place; she thought it was very beautiful and almost wished she could always be here. But she knew better.

Haraq snuck up behind her and startled her. He didn't mean to, but he felt it necessary to explain himself.

"I apologize for startling you, but I felt I should try to answer any questions you might have."

"What the hell are you doing here?" she almost yelled. "I thought you were with the high council!"

"Well, I was. But this is, as you call it, like a movie. This event is a memory of mine. I merely projected it into your mind so we could share it. Then, I entered your mind so I could explain myself."

"But how can you do that? Projecting thoughts into my mind? Entering my mind? Is this some kind of magic?"

"No. But it is almost as complicated. I will merely tell you this: we are from another plane of existence, and in this other plane, we are energy beings instead of mass beings, like yourself. Because we are energy we can pass through mass very easily. We have learned that we can interact with the energy that produces thoughts in sentient mass beings. Through that means, we can project our thoughts into your mind, as well as enter yours with extreme ease."

She floated in thought for a while. "Does this mean that you guys are more intelligent than we are?"

"Yes, we are much more intelligent than most mass beings. We have learned the mechanics of thoughts and minds. We are, in a sense, disembodied minds."

"Then for what reason would you need to make friends on other worlds if you are so much more intelligent than they?"

"Because they have one resource that we do not. Mass."

"Mass?"

"Yes. In our world, pieces of mass are few and far between. If we wish to 'stay ahead' of the other mass worlds, we will need mass to build computers, machines, friggin' seats, and other things we don't have in our world, but have been doing fine without."

She seemed to be in over her head. But her logical thinking allowed her to keep up just long enough to say, "Well, if you have been doing fine without them, then why should you bother getting them?"

Haraq thought a while on this one. "Imagine one world that has things that another one does not. Let's say that one world discovered a weapon that could destroy a planet. That means that the first world has something more powerful than the second, and can use that power to manipulate the other planet. Unless the other planet has the same weapon, then they cancel each other out. Without being more powerful than the other, the first planet is back to square one."

She floated and thought about this a while. "So you are afraid that other worlds will come and try to control you, like countries were afraid of the U.S. during the cold war?"

"No. We are incapable of fear. We merely would not like it if our entire world was taken over by beings from a power-hungry world. That would put a damper on our quest for knowledge. As for your U.S. reference, yes that is a close, and rough, example."

She floated and thought some more. "I still have one question," she said.

"Yes?"

"What could I possibly do that could help you, and what could you do to help me?"

"Cure you, of course. We have learned that in mass beings, physical wounds can be healed by alternative methods other than the ones you often use. The exact process is very complicated, and I could not hope to explain it to you in the moments we have. But what we will have to do to cure you is blank your mind. Then we perform the process and cure you. If we don't blank your mind, then there is a possibility of killing your mind. But first, you must agree to help us."

"How?" she said, almost angrily.

"Let's go back to your room first."

\* \* \* \* \*

She awoke. She wondered if she had been dreaming about Haraq and his world. But the damp washrag over her face slithering away was proof enough. She was still lying down when Haraq spoke again. She wasn't sure if she even wanted to look at him. The fact that for the past hour she had been carrying on an important conversation with a washrag just set in, and she was not sure if she wanted to continue any farther. She knew that if word got out, she would be transferred to the "psycho-ward," and that is definitely not something she wanted to do. However, if she continued to converse with Haraq, who knew what could happen? Maybe she would end up believing the rag could talk. Then there was the scariest idea of all: what if Haraq was really real. Stranger things had happened.

"Are you awake?" inquired Haraq.

With a sigh, she replied, "Yes."

"Then are you not well? I noticed you are not sitting up, and that is the normal position humans take while conscious. Can I help you?"

She considered what would happen if she told Haraq of her problem. If she did tell him that she believed he did not exist, then there was the possibility that Haraq would make the same realization and just slither away. However, Haraq, being Haraq, would probably come up with some logical argument to prove that he did exist, and therefore she would be forced to agree with him. C'est la vie!

"No," was her ultimate reply.

"Then I will tell you how you can help us."

She perked up slightly. She was, after all, interested in this. She sat up slowly and turned toward Haraq. She looked at him, interested, and lapsed into an innocent little girl voice when she mouthed, "Would you?"

He seemed to ponder what he was going to say. He finally decided upon this: "I told you that to heal you, we would first have to blank your mind, and then heal you physically. Does this trouble you at all?"

"Well... just so long as you bring my mind back."

Haraq did something she thought he was practically incapable of. He said, "Uhmmm..." She was almost frightened, even though she had only known this... energy for a few hours, and she hadn't agreed to do anything yet. But he did something that she had never experienced before, something almost intimate. She shared a thought with him, literally. And from that she was given the impression that he could never be indecisive. And even if he didn't know what he was going to say, he could say something that showed that he appeared to know what he was talking about. His "uhmmm" scared her. She waited in great anticipation for what would follow.

"When we blank your mind and you perform the task that we need you to, there is a good chance that a large portion of your mind won't come back. And on top of that, when we bring your mind back you will remember everything that you did when your mind was blanked. Supposing you are not affected by the mind blank, you might be changed by what happens to you while you perform the task. You might be someone else when you come back. That is what I was reluctant to tell you."

She sat in thought for quite some time. The idea that she could end up someone else when her mind came back didn't scare her much. In fact, anything would be better than what she was doing now. However, what if that new person was not someone she liked? Would this be a smart idea? Would she even be able to tell if she liked the person she became?

"What is the task you want me to perform?" she asked.

"It is quite complicated, but quite essential to our survival. I will tell you about it later, after you have had time to think about what I have said."

“Our’ survival? There are more of you? Where?”

“If you don’t mind, I must go back and discuss some things with my friends. You will need time to think about what has happened. Am I right?”

Time was something she would need. She couldn’t just jump into a decision like this. “Yes you are. But where will you go? And when will you come back?”

“We will go to a place like the one in the thought I showed you. When I come back I will bring some friends. Do you think you can bring many washrags here tomorrow?”

“Yes, I think.”

“Thank you. As for when we will come back, is 2:00 P.M. a convenient time for you?”

“Yes.”

“Then I will leave.”

And he did.

She couldn’t believe the implications of what had just happened. She sat in thought for quite a long time. She eventually left her room.

To Be Continued...



### Through Every New Door

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The door swung open gingerly. I peered through and oft I wondered if perhaps this too was a door laced with magic. That is all I needed, another life-changing door. My mother always said that I should proceed with caution through every new door. I guess I really should have listened to her.

At the point in my life when she most often said that, I didn’t believe in magic. I didn’t believe that something beyond what could be scientifically explained actually existed in the world. Some people say that they won’t believe it until they see it. I was the same way. I didn’t believe in magic until I walked through that door.

Walking down the street early one morning when I was six, I stumbled into a tall colored man. I don’t remember anything about the city the street was in, or where it was, except that it seemed as if it should have been crowded. Instead, the only traveler, aside from myself, was the black man.

The buildings were tall, perhaps two or three stories, but no taller. The littered parking spaces stood empty, but in my mind I sensed them to be anything but vacant. My eyes looked up to the man’s face and the buildings beyond, and I thought that every window must be hiding a set of eyes.

I stopped and watched as the black man’s eyes met my own, and he continued walking even after he passed me. I turned, compelled to watch him, and saw him walk between two of the looming edifices. After a brief moment of thoughtlessly standing, I turned to follow him into the narrow alley. When I turned the corner I was surprised to see him standing there with his back pressed against the wall, apparently waiting for me.

Without words he motioned for me to sit, as he did, with my back against the wall opposite him, which seemed to be a particularly narrow five foot span. This put our knees very nearly touching the others. I sat there waiting for him to speak and I felt as if I was a pupil waiting to be taught by an esteemed scholar. He said, surprised, “Silly boy, you don’t believe in magic,” got up and walked back into the street and away.

After I got back into the motel room I was staying in with my mother I told her of the man and what he said and she, too, called me a silly boy.

“Proceed with caution through every new door.”

A few years later, my mother and I were finally able to say we had a home. She wrote a letter to Oklahoma to hear about the condition of her former husband, my father. He was in a car accident shortly after he divorced my mum. He was a very wealthy man, so the expenses of keeping him under care and alive bit little out of his fortune. When he had died, my mother, even though she was no longer legally wed to him, was the sole beneficiary of all that was once his. Of his assets there was a large hotel. A Comfort Inn with several floors that had been left

vacant. The staff had left long ago, and when my mother acquired it I found myself living there alone with her in her attempts to re-establish it.

I was walking through the vast halls somewhere on the third or fourth floor one day when I thought that I heard footsteps in one of the rooms. I stood perplexed and in an instant of thought I burst through the door. The room lay empty. I searched the room in haste, not yelling for my mum as I might have done last year or the year before. I clambered into the small bathroom and found nothing there as well. The entire room stood spinning around me as I turned, devoid of all human breath except mine.

I walked back into the hall, confused and yet wary. I knew I heard footsteps! I was sure of it!

Just then I heard them again. This time right around the corner of the hall in which I stood. I raced to the turn and as I rounded it I saw a man's shoe barely slip into a room, out of sight. I walked slowly, catching my breath as I did. I knew that I had whoever it was caught. I saw the room; there was no way that he could escape. Just as I came to the first door the door ahead opened and a head popped out saying, "Silly boy." The face of the black man, the same black man, stood etched into my memory. This was the same man I remember from my early childhood--the same braided dreadlocks that haunted my memory and my dreams.

I stumbled to the next door, uncertain if the man would be inside. I saw the stairway door in front of me as I stood not facing the door, not sure if I should bother entering. Just as I had suspected, the man popped out from the last door in the hall and vaulted through the emergency door into the stairwell. I jogged to the door. My feet stopped and my heart raced. I read the words written in large, bold print on the sign posted beside the door. "Proceed with caution," it said.

"...Through every new door," I finished aloud.

"What the hell is going on!"

I opened the door and stepped inside. The black man was gone. I searched silently as I listened for his footfalls. There were none. I discontinued my search, this time not telling my mother. I resented being called a little boy, and I would not let this bother me.

Once the Hotel was again operating with relative efficiency I took to exploring the recesses of it. I am sixteen now, and it has been nearly seven years since I last saw the black man.

I find it odd that I had not explored all of the hotel in that time but now I would not be content until I had explored every facet of the building. On the first floor there were many closets that held chairs and maintenance equipment. I did not think to explore them, because I made the assumption that they were all just more of the same things.

On the sixth day I was exploring, I was walking past many of these doors on a short errand for my mother. I got an eerie feeling and turned toward where it seemed to be emanating from. In front of me was a door that I could never remember going into. Around its edges energy seemed to be oozing. I felt compelled and uncomfortable. I needed to see what was behind that door. I opened it and time seemed to slow. I thought what must have been hundreds of thoughts in the time my hand made it to the handle. I turned it as my mind raced. The door opened slowly, and I felt the energy that passed.

My world changed. I began to see unexplainable things. I can't explain what I see or why I see it. In the doorway to the closet was the black man. His only words at the time were, "Now you believe in magic," and he disappeared.

I haven't seen the man since. I now see magic working in everything and that has helped me to become a better person. I can make decisions better. I can tell the difference between the good things and the bad things by the magic that comes from out of it. I have made myself quite a rich person in the hotel business.

Today I stand in front of yet another door that seems eerie. The magic that comes out of it is different than any kind I have interpreted before.

I'm not concerned. I'll be careful. I have always remembered to proceed with caution through every new door.

### THE ULTIMATE WORD SEARCH

This is a word search but, as you can see, it's no ordinary one. First you must unscramble the letters in the words (Hint: each column is a certain category). Then you code the word with the code lines. After that, all you have to do is find the coded word in the word search.

HAPPY WORD HUNTING!!!!!!

TBARBI	OADIMDN	AABNNA	AYHRR	OROEGR
EDRE	OCAL	EMARLPTEE	EOGGRE	HOIAD
OGSOE	GAHITRPE	OMOUSMRH	LLJI	SISRUA
NHMUA	EALD	DIAYS	EVTES	NANGEGLD

REAL LETTER SUBSTITUTE	ABCDEF <span style="font-size: small;">GHIJKLMNOPQRSTUVWXYZ</span> <span style="font-size: small;">FGHIJKLMNOP123456789ØABCDE</span>
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A Q P W V B O 2 V H B E 7 Z 8 X S O N 1 1  
H A L Z F A 4 T 9 4 R T 2 H 2 X V L A X G  
F B F 9 1 4 M I N F 2 4 3 I F 8 D 2 S U W  
6 L 3 R 7 I 4 M 7 1 6 5 4 3 R 3 8 3 M Y 3  
4 C F M 2 F 5 1 J 9 7 J J C O 9 N Ø Ø L O  
Z 7 8 J T A B C A A N T V X G 8 F 9 2 5 6  
R O G 9 2 2 7 Ø J U I F J 1 A T I 3 F 9 D  
2 8 V N H 3 F B 9 E 2 7 7 I 1 L U 5 3 C U  
N 8 E M W L G J 8 3 P P Z J 3 L 1 F 3 I V  
A N 2 5 H 2 G L X 4 1 Ø I E D C Q 3 W S U  
D F Ø F G L N 7 5 L Ø 5 G J L 7 A F Y 9 Z  
R F 9 7 H G 9 4 O J 2 T F 4 J 8 7 3 D X R  
7 K D L I I I J Ø 7 5 G C Z 9 7 2 F J U T  
A F G D N A J L 4 4 8 J 1 Y X W V G M Q J  
N I F M 4 T J H R 6 7 C J H L N 4 P O M K

Tim Hadley

### The Tapestry Chair by Camile Lawson

Hilary Ashton sauntered calmly down the street he found himself on 5th street; taking a right he turned onto Claremont Blvd. and walked a block. He then took another left on 4th street, walked three blocks and ran up the stairs to his second floor apartment, number fourteen.

Hilary worked as a mail clerk in the lower part of Manhattan. His job had proved to be quite a dull one. He worked ten hour days, six days a week, in that basement. It was cold and drafty in the winter and sticky and humid in the summer.

He lived a quiet, solitary life confined within his two bedroom flat. It was a drab affair. His front room consisted of a hide a bed with tatters throughout. Against one wall was a bookcase full of old books; by a window was a high back chair, it seemed oddly out of place. It was furnished in a rich tapestry of forest green and warm browns. It displayed none of the shabbiness evident in the other furnishings found around the room. He had received the chair from a aunt who had always found his company the most pleasurable of all the nieces and nephews.

Coming to his apartment door he silently opened it. Without turning a light on he made his way across a black room and stopped in front of the chair.

The chair was positioned in front of the window overlooking a deserted park. The street lights below created a haze above the trees. A few people walked from a movie theater down the street.

Hilary eased himself into the chair; leaning back he closed his eyes. He opened them to gaze out the window--but instead found himself surrounded by people where once only his shabby room had been.

"Hello Hilary," said a smartly dressed red head. "We thought you'd never come."

"Things were quite busy at work today," Hilary said slowly.

He gazed around the room. Everyone was still here; still as it was the night before. A burly fellow walked up to him and patted him on the back.

"Hello again Hilary," said Frank. "Glad you could make it."

Hilary found himself standing among a small group of cheerful people.

"I'm sure you'd like to freshen up. The bathroom is down the hall, the second door on the right," said a young woman sipping champagne.

Going into the bathroom he splashed water onto his face and combed his hair. He felt refreshed and rejoined the group. He helped himself to a cocktail as a maître d passed by. He walked among the people, mingling. He found Frank once again talking with a young woman.

"Why hello Hilary. I would like you to meet Frances."

"How do you do?" asked Hilary.

"Very well, thank you," said the young woman.

"I need to be organizing the dinner," said Frances. He skipped off among the growing number of people.

"I wanted to talk to him," said Hilary looking at his departing figure in the crowd.

"He's always running around like that. He wants everyone here to have a good time," explained Frances.  
"How long have you been here?"

"Only about twenty minutes," he replied.

"Oh, so you're not a permanent resident yet?" she asked, surprised.

"Yet? No, no I'm not. I've only been coming to this place for a couple of nights."

"This is a heavenly place," sighed Frances. "Anything we desire to see or do we just do it. Many of us are people who had never tasted life before this. I had been as a secretary before; it was only when I came here that I discovered I had a beautiful voice. Everyone here has a talent they knew nothing of until their arrival here."

"I used to play the piano," Hilary commented, "but I quip when I was twelve. We didn't have enough money to continue my lessons."

Just then a small waiter walked quietly into the room. Ringing a bell he announced, "If you will follow me to the dining room I will show you to your seat."

The group walked into the richly furnished dining room. The room was painted a striking yellow color. Paintings hung on the glowing walls all around; Picasso, Rembrandt, Monet, the variety of each left Hilary quite enthralled. Upon the large mantel had been placed many lovely porcelain figurines. The room with all its rarity had a calming effect.

Hilary was seated next to Frances at the long table. They ate the glorious meal with a relish and afterward they adjourned to the sitting room. A magnificent piano sat in the corner. Frank directed Hilary over to it and Hilary sat down. He stared at the keys for a moment and then began to play awkwardly the first notes of some sheet music placed on the piano. As he became more confident he showed greater improvement. Ending he sat in amazement; slowly he stood up.

"Very nice Hilary," said Frank, smiling.

"I must leave," Hilary said as his body began shaking uncontrollably. His face had turned white and he barely had the strength to walk. Frank took Hilary's arm and walked him into the living room and sat him in the chair that he had arrived in. Frank took a chair opposite Hilary.

"Just close your eyes Hilary," Frank spoke smoothly and with a calming rhythm in his voice.

Hilary's eyes closed. He listened to Frank's voice and drifted off into sleep. Upon waking he found himself again in his shabby apartment, sitting in his armchair. He slowly got to his feet; looking at his watch he noticed the time and proceeded to get ready for work. He went to work. All that day his mind mulled over the night's activities. On coming home he noticed just how vacuous his life was. On coming home he walked straight to the chair. He sat down and closed his eyes and again found himself in the large house. Frank welcomed him with a cocktail. Frances introduced him to some more of the guests--most of them permanent tenants, but a few like him

were just visiting. He found the conversation stimulating. The talk of literature, art and music floated all around him.

After dinner Hilary again played the piano. He found that he had improved greatly over the proceeding night. Frances sang along with the music. Frances sang with a flute-like voice; Hilary listened to the words with new ears, having never heard a more enchanting voice. Later on in the evening they walked among the house's gardens. They walked among the flowers and shrubs, listening to the melodious nightfall. After a long moment of silence Hilary turned to Frances.

"I need to leave. I've had a wonderful time," he said to her.

"Yes, I felt that you might say that."

They walked back towards the house arm in arm. Hilary departed once again in the chair.

The next morning he awoke as always in the chair. As he went off to work there was a song upon his lips. He felt exhilarated and more alive than he had ever felt in his twenty-nine years of existence. As he got closer to his job he could not sing any longer; he began to see the uselessness in living this kind of life. His work did not fulfill any of his personal desires. He now had a taste of real living and could not return to the drudgery of his former lifestyle. He crossed the street and began walking back the way he had come. Whistling a sweet tune he began walking faster and faster. Running up the stairs he raced into the apartment; he walked across the room, sat once again in the chair, and closed his eyes.

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### One Rainy Night

by an anonymous author

It was a dark and dreary night. The rain was pouring. There was thunder and lightning. The streets were flooded. They looked like rivers going this way and that all through town.

I live a ways from town in a valley. Our house is a two story house with a basement. It is an old house. We were told that General Grant watered his horses in the creek. The creek is just outside the house. Well, anyway, enough about my place. Let's get on with the story.

I was walking through the forest. I was about two miles from home. I was soaked to the bone. As I walked, my boots squeaked under my feet. As I was walking, I saw something off in the distance. It looked like a person. With curiosity I walked slowly toward the thing. As I got closer to it, I realized it was a girl. I walked up to her slowly. She was the most beautiful girl I had ever seen. She had long, brown hair and brown eyes.

When I got a few feet away from her I realized she was hurt. I asked if she could talk, thinking she may be too shocked or too scared to talk. She didn't say anything. So I walked up to her. She shrank back. I told her, "It will be okay. I won't hurt you. I want to see your cuts on your face. I can help you."

I moved slowly and moved her hands from her face. She wasn't cut that badly. Then I saw her leg. She had a giant gash in it.

Remembering a cave I had seen last time I was here, I looked around. Then I saw the cave up on the rocks. I asked the girl if she could walk. She shook her head meaning no. So carefully and slowly I picked her up and carried her up to the cave. I had some dry sticks in the cave and built a fire inside the cave. I took off my coat and put it around her to warm her up.

There is a creek down at the bottom of the hill. I found an old pot by the creek and filled it with water. I took it back up to the cave. She was still awake. I took off my shirt and tore it into rags. They were already soaked, but I dipped them into the water and got them wetter. I carefully cleaned off her cuts the best I could. I bandaged up the cut on her leg the best I could. While I was fixing her up, she started to talk.

When she was fully confident to talk I asked her who she was.

She said, "I am Corelena Nichols. I live in Roseburg. I ran away from my family two days ago. They were going to have me put into an orphanage. I never want to go back 'til I am grown up. Then they will not have the right to put me into an orphanage."

"Where were you planning to go?"

"Well, I didn't really have a destination. I was just going to go, and where ever I ended up at would be fine with me."

"Well, I just live with my mom, and if you want to stay with us, you are welcome."

"I wouldn't want to impose on you."

"Oh, you are no bother. Matter of fact we would love to have you stay with us. It gets boring just living with my mom. We never agree on anything. This is what we have been hoping for, someone else in the family."

"Well, if you don't think your mom will turn me in, I will be happy to stay with you."

"One thing we do agree with, is to stay out of other people's business."

"You know, I believe you haven't told me your name."

"My name is Jason Pritz."

"Well, Jason, you must promise not to tell anyone what I told you. Agreed?"

"Agreed."

Then we were silent for a few minutes. The rain stopped. I asked her if she had enough strength to walk home. She said she did. We got up and started to walk. As we were walking I began to wonder what had happened to her. Why was she all cut up? I decided to ask her.

"How did you get all cut up?"

"Well, as I was walking through the woods enjoying my walk, I heard something in the woods. Then all of a sudden a wild dog jumped out of nowhere."

"How did you get away?"

"I picked up the nearest stick. With luck I picked up a giant stick. Then I hit as hard as I could. The dog didn't stay very long after that."

"How long were you there?"

"I wasn't there very long I don't think. I probably fell asleep."

As we continued walking I heard something in the bushes. I asked Corelena if she heard that. She didn't say anything. We stood there for a minute. Then I saw it. It was a faun. It had white dots all over its back. It was a cute little thing. Then just behind it, its mom came out of the bushes. That made Corelena's face light up. The two deer walked by. I knew then that I loved Corelena.

When we got home I introduced her to mom. They got along fine. My mom was happy to have her in the family. She would end up staying for four years. My love grew for her day by day. That is why she stayed for four years. We got married and found a place of our own. We are still married. That day in the rain I will remember always.

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### Rails By Night

by Wendy D. Fuller

As I lay myself to sleep I hear the rumbling of the railroad tracks near my house. My trained ear singles out the lonely car racing South at break-neck speed. Suddenly, I am having a vision of an orange truck, probably a nightly railroad construction crew just heading home, with tires whirling and rail riders swirling as if time were moving backwards. I hear nothing. My mind is in a vacuum; sound cannot escape.

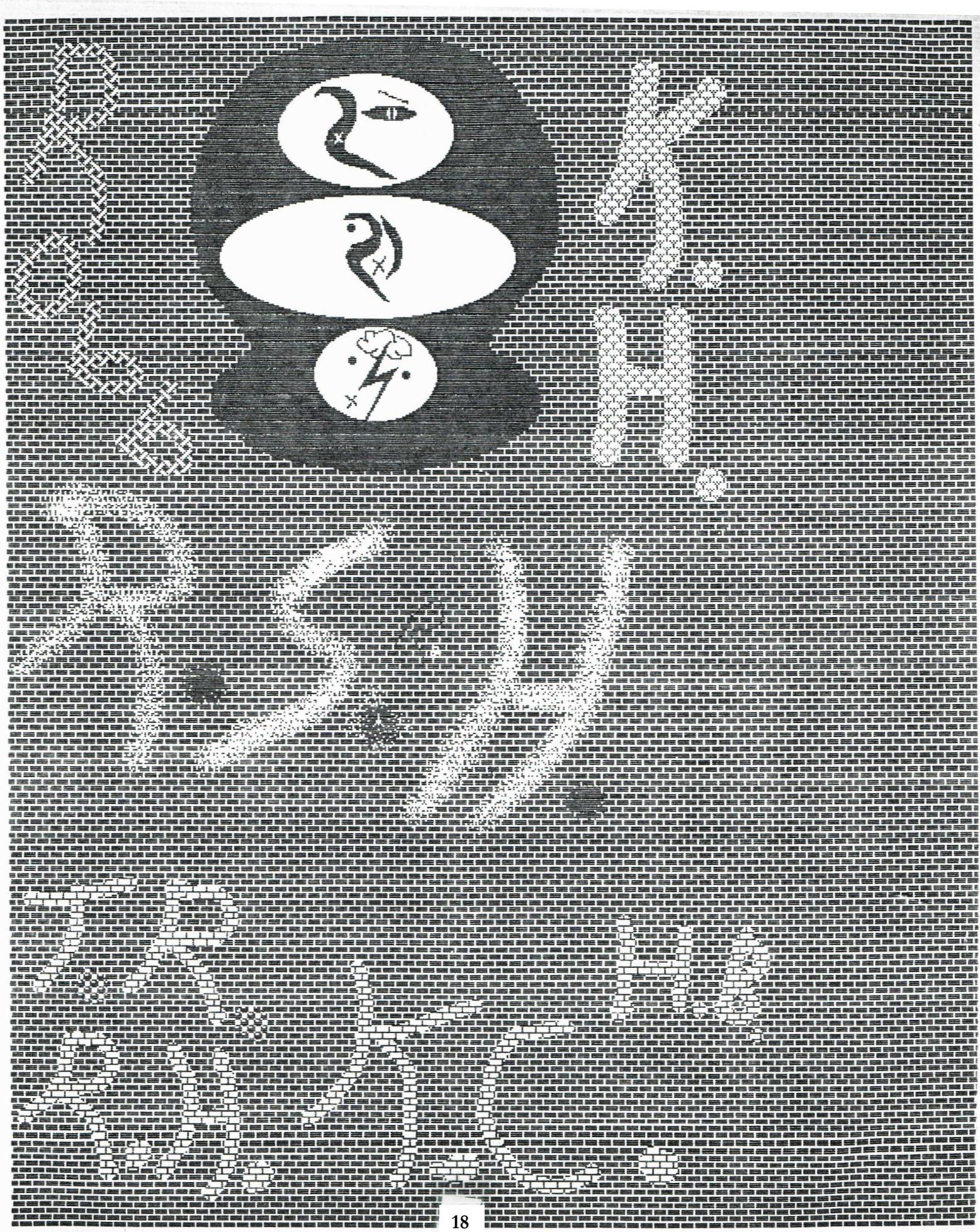
My vision zooms into the cab where several frantic figures reside. The first is wearing an orange metal hat that has chipped paint showing chrome. He wears a denim shirt with white buttons rolled up past the elbows. Underneath, he wears a red T-shirt that shows at the neck. In his denim shirt I can see a pack of generic 100's ready to be used at any time.

The man sits ashen faced and ridged with white knuckles as he grasps the rubber steering wheel in front of him. In the instant that the truck hurtles under a street lamp, located across the drain ditch from the tracks, I see his heavy, boot encased, foot pressed to the floor on top of the gas pedal.

Through the rain blanketed windows the light creates a kaleidoscope by stretching and reshaping the black streaks of water and turning it around on two other figures--a man and a woman--giving them a look of unreality. They ghoulishly stare out the back window in dreadful anxiety.

Both are dressed similarly to the first man but the woman is wearing orange denim overalls on top of her other work clothes. The pale features of their faces are contrasted with black smudges that look to be oil or grease.

The second man is sitting in the passenger seat with his body twisted sideways and his feet in the aisle. He puffs on a cigarette sporadically while he turns and says something with silent lips to the first man. Smoke fills the interior, clouding the clarity of my vision as it wafts toward the ceiling.



The phosphorescent speedometer is now the only illumination as its eerie green glow outlines the gaunt faces of the passengers. The first man turns his head nervously a fraction to glance at the second man while saying something in reply. There is fear on both faces... Why?

I don't understand what is happening. I've lost myself and yet I'm still here, conscious and feeling...

There is a beam of light coming from behind them now and in its brilliance I can see the silhouette of the woman with her knees on the cushions and her elbows on the seat back--praying.

The beam is getting closer...

The men in the front seats start yelling at each other and gesticulating wildly. The two men are trying to open their doors by kicking and throwing their weight upon them but they won't budge. The woman doesn't notice.

The beam is very close and gaining...

The woman has finished praying and looks towards the light...

The beam is blinding now...

The two men have tears rolling down their panic stricken faces. The driver puts all his weight on the gas pedal to no avail.

The light is so close it covers everything in its path...

A look of calm fills the woman. She's ready.

The men turn and stare at the light. Black thoughts of horror are clearly written on their faces.

All there is, is light. Light...

\* \* \*

I awake to see my digital alarm clock reading 8:23 A.M. Confusion and fear dissipate as sunlight streams into my room through pink curtains with white polka dots. I am so greatly relieved to see the rays dancing across my hardwood floor that I jump out of bed and run to the open window. I look out to see steam rising off of neighboring roof-tops and the rain drenched street. Birds are singing as they dart past my thankful eyes. The nightmare was just that--and now it is over.

I dress and go downstairs to the smell of bacon, eggs, buttered toast, and fried potatoes. I finish my large breakfast and drift into the Living Room to look for the TV. schedule. I find it lying on top of the morning paper. As I pick it up, underneath is a picture of a mangled orange truck lying in a ditch with plywood and derailed train cars scattered all around it. The headline reads: "Three Railroad Employees Killed in Bizarre Train Accident."

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### Sleepless Nights

by Josh Minter

It is late, I should be sleeping and yet I cannot sleep. I am not sure what I want to do, so I lie here thinking, wondering why I cannot sleep. I think perhaps it could be stress that keeps me awake, then again perhaps not. I turn on my light in hopes that it will clear up my thinking, maybe even illuminate the answer to my insomnia.

I look at the clock. It is two-thirty in the morning. Maybe reading would help, I think to myself as I pick up a book. I look at the cover for a second, and then I open it. After reading for only a few minutes, I get bored and close the book.

I look at my watch and see that it is two forty-five. My stomach is growling, so I decide to get something to eat. I open the door to my room and walk down two corridors, ending up at the stairs. The stairs tend to creak, so I take each step carefully and slowly. As I reach the bottom of the stairs, I hear a noise behind me. I turn to find my cat at my feet.

The kitchen is illuminated only by the soft moonlight flowing in through the window. I step over to the fridge and open it. A burst of light comes rushing forth from within. I rummage through the fridge until I find some leftover chicken, then I close the door, once again sealing away the light.

After eating I return to my room. I sit down on my bed and look out my window. As I stare into the darkness, I think about all that has happened in my life. I think of all the great friends in my life, and even some of my enemies. I also think about all of the happy times along with some of the sad. With these thoughts in my head I barely notice the lone car driving by at three in the morning. I think to myself, as I lie down and turn out the light, that perhaps the driver is someone I know. With that thought I fall asleep.

### **Condemned**

by Damon Brice

Can't wait for a release oh no  
 There's nothing left to do  
 But gather in the darkness  
 All those eager fools--  
 Those pieces of myself, all those  
 Who rushed toward insanity  
 To save my from the restless  
 Reckless reasoning reality.  
 That crashed as if 'pon rocky shore  
 Of my beliefs and hopes  
 Pounding all my dreams away  
 Residing on those slopes  
 Until the waves humanity  
 Sent buffeting my code  
 Left nothing but the pebbles;  
 Endless ebbing they erode.

### **Thunderstorms**

The skies grow dark. There is utter silence, as if the beasts of the night have stopped to listen. The serenity overwhelms me, like a dark shadow. For moment, time has stopped.

Suddenly, as if a fireball has hit the earth, the sky is illuminated by lights. I stand in amazement, unable to tear my gaze away from this awesome spectacle in the sky.

Almost immediately following the lights, I hear a roar which causes the ground to tremble. The frightening but beautiful example of nature's power continues for what seems to be an eternity, then stops as suddenly as it began. I am left in silence.

The creatures around me begin their continuous cries again. I turn to enter civilization once more.

Tim Hadley

### **Good-bye To Love**

by Amy sperling

I'll say good-bye to love  
 No one ever cared if I should live or die  
 Time and time again the dance for love has  
 passed me by

I just can't seem to find it  
 so I've made up my mind, I must live my life  
 alone, and though it's not easy, I guess I've  
 always known... I'd say good-bye to love

Are there not tomorrows for this heart of mine?

Surely time will lose these bitter  
 memories and I'll find that there are some who  
 will believe in me and live for  
 something I could live for

All these years of useless search  
 have finally reached an end  
 Loneliness and empty days will be my only  
 friend  
 From this day on love will be forgotten but I'll  
 go one as best I can

### **Reason**

by Damon Brice

Indefinite estrangement from impossible relief  
 Deceptive complications to an infinite belief  
 Rejected implications on a whim betrayed by fate  
 Reconstituted intellect makes hope regenerate

An impeccable translation of the thoughts which I hold dear  
 A prosaic desecration of that which I revere  
 Disparaging Conscription to society's conform  
 Subverted concentration from immortal inner storms

Falling down  
 Falling out  
 Falling over  
 Falling off  
 Release Me  
 Won't you listen to reason?

Extended separation from the world within my soul  
 Denied a restitution for the life & love you've stole  
 Collective resignation to abolishment of hope  
 Constraining indecision--it's impossible to cope

## Late Night Deliveries

by Kelly Ballance

His eyes scan the immense gray building that looms up before him. He shifts the package that he holds under his arm in order to get it through the doors. The autos slide wide open and he steps through. The night ward looks up from his book.

“Got a delivery for yas,” the man with the large package says.

“Go right in,” the ward answers.

“Thank ya, I’ll be right out, shore as the moon above in our night skies.” The ward nods and as the man walks away he thinks to himself that maybe that man’s mind isn’t quite on track.

The man’s heels make a solemn clicking on the stone tiled floor. He gets to the elevator and pushes the down arrow.

His destination is the bio-engineering level, which lies four miles beneath the Earth’s surface. It takes a few minutes before the doors decide to let him into the red-carpeted compartment. He pushes the orange button marked for the Bio level. The doors slide shut and the elevator begins its descent. He hums a small tune, known only to him, as he waits for the doors to open again.

“Got to be patient,” he says to himself. He is already showing courage just by getting into an eight by six elevator with the specimen. He remembers it’s only sedated for two hours.

All that is on his mind is dropping off the box and jammin’ home for his TV dinner.

The elevator lets out a low whine.

Chug, chug. KATHUNK!

“Wha Fu?” he exclaims.

The elevator stops abruptly and the lights flicker, then the whole contraption steadies. Suddenly, the elevator jerks a few more times before stopping completely with the lights out.

“Merde,” he says flatly. There’s no problem, though. He’ll just get on the elevator phone and ring Ward Cleaver upstairs to come and haul him out.

He reaches out blindly, grabs the phone and hold it to his ear.

Only silence comes back to him, complete and utter silence. The man drops the phone and sits down. He sets his package on the far side of the elevator.

An hour passes. The guy is really panicked now.

“Great,” he says. “I’m stuck in here with some kind of killer bee, swollen to enormous sizes, who will be waking up any time now!” His voice whines and cracks with the intensity of his yelling.

“Let ME OUT!!” he screams.

There is a rustle somewhere. The man falls silent, listening. Movement again. A sound like membrane wings on cardboard.

“Oh, Holy Jehosiphat!” the man screeches.

Another scratch.

“NO! Oh GOD NO!” The man shakes his head furiously.

There is another sound, like that of celery being eaten.

The man jumps to his feet and madly starts thumping on all the buttons on the control panel. When he finds that they do nothing for him, he moves to the doors and wildly pounds on them, but his wildness is not without some purpose.

“Let Me OUT!”

There is a sound that one could listen to (if you wished), the sound of a baby vulture breaking forth from his egg prison. The man whimpers and turns to face the sound.

“For the want of a light and knife a life was lost,” he mutters.

There is a buzzing followed by screams of total horror and anguish.

Later, after the chewing’s of many soft things, there is a belch of satisfaction and the sounds of a blood thirsty creature settling down for a comfortable sleep.

The next morning the elevator lights flicker back to life, and the elevator resumes its travel downward.

There is an angry buzzing when the elevator from hell stops on the bio-engineering level. The doors slide open (much to the satisfaction of the killer bee) and the bee that just happened to be(e) swollen to incomprehensible sizes bumbles out and, if one cared to look into the elevator’s contents, (one would likely see

one's breakfast for a second time that day) one would see a gangly man with his eyes, ears and tongue chewed away, then one would watch the heavy metal doors of this small box of horror close.

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### The Temptation

by D. O'Dorant

The young man ran into the bathroom and ducked into a stall. The policeman stuck his head in, glanced around, then continued on, believing his quarry to still be running.

Whew, that was a close call. Maybe it had been a mistake to hijack that plane. Oh well. What he needed right now was a good stiff drink before going sight-seeing in the Isles.

Cautiously he made his way to the airport exit and, evading all police using a few ninja skills he'd learned from the Orient, he left the terminal.

Traffic was light and before long the youth was sitting in a bar sipping a bourbon and reading a newspaper.

A small article caught his eye. "Car manufacturer's convention in Soho." That meant that those that he hated would be there.

No time to waste! He flung money at the barkeep and fled out the door.

The youth wasted several minutes trying to find a cab. He managed to hail one and told the driver to go to Soho.

"We're in Soho now," the cabbie told him puzzledly.

"Oh... nevermind." He got out and then set off to the hotel where the convention was happening at. It was across the street.

First and foremost, he went inside and rented a room above the convention hall.

Leaving his room for ice, he literally ran into another occupant of the hotel. It was Simons, the leader of the Psychopathic Murderers Unanimous group. Kill kill kill.

The young man grabbed the small fully automatic machine pistol that he always kept on him, and blasted Simons into nonexistence.

Others came running from their hotel rooms to see what the furor was. They were all members of PMU. Warily they advanced toward him, each holding a weapon of mayhem.

The young man almost laughed. He wanted them in the very worst way. Let them approach.

Fifteen minutes and about two dozen corpses later, the young man began wiring plastic explosives around the hotel. He paused a moment. Should he kill everyone? He had only sworn vengeance against some of the car makers. Oh well. Let temptation run its course. Kill 'em all. He hated cars anyhow. From now on, he'd stick to riding horses.

The young man also realized he wasn't sick. He was cured! Suddenly the youth began to sneeze. No, no no! Now he had hay fever!

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### That Sunday That Summer

by Becky Erbes

As the sun crept through the sheer pink curtains of the little girls' room, she blinked her eyes open and yawned. Rubbing vigorously with small closed fists, she rescued her baby browns from shutting tight again. Throwing her feet over the side of the bed and standing up, she walked to her bedroom door and quietly opened it, not wanting to wake anyone from their nights slumber. She tiptoes down the hall making no sounds, descended down the stairs, and walked into the kitchen heading for the refrigerator. The room was still dark for the dawn's light had not made its way through the small window in the back of the dining room. Opening the ice box illuminated the gloomy place a bit. She took out a piece of bread from the fridge and shut the door. Silently bounding through the house, up the stairs and to her bedroom, she felt safe and secure. She pulled the covers around her neck and munched on her bread. She looked about her surroundings with pleasure. Pink was a great color for a five year old girl and she loved her room. Curled up in her canopy bed, she surveyed her toys, noticing

that her play stove had been left of the coffee table. It was to stay there; she wasn't about to go back downstairs and face all that darkness again. Polishing off her last bite of bread, she jumped out of bed and headed for her closet. She opened the huge oak door and peered inside, checking for anything living. Finding nothing, she took out her white dress with the red ribbon belt and her white shoes. Next she went over to her dresser, opened both top drawers, took out a clean pair of underwear from one and a pair of new white tights from the other. Carefully, she laid everything on her bed and took off her jammies.

Today was church day, so she had to look especially pretty. She put on all the garments chosen and walked into the bathroom, suddenly realizing that she hadn't gone potty. After flushing the toilet, she brushed her teeth and long red hair, highlighted with blonde streaks from the summer sun, and scrubbed her hands clean. She stepped across the hall and opened her parents' door slowly, stopping suddenly when it squeaked. Making herself as small as she possibly could, she squeezed through the passage into the huge blue and white kingdom. She turned the corner of mirrors to find her beautiful mommy choosing her own dress for the morning. The small child looked at her mother in awe, watching her take out a simple black dress of which she created a masterpiece with different belts and jewelry. Without being noticed, she slipped across the room like a soft breeze and sat on the floor behind a chair. Her mother gracefully sat on the edge of her bed and began to roll one leg of her nylons. The innocent admired her matriarch so, she believed no wrong could be done by this radiant woman. Finished with applying her 'hose, her mommy walked back to the closet. The movement the king-sized waterbed made as she left caused the bundle under the covers to moan and roll over peacefully. The child smiled, knowing that the hump of sheets was the daddy she loved so dearly.

"Tom, get up and get ready for church," the girl's mom told the bundle.

"Mm," was the only response.

"Thomas!" Mom scolded playfully.

"Okay, okay. What time is it?"

"9:30. We have to leave this house in no more than 45 minutes."

"Are the kids up?"

"No, not yet."

"I am!" the child bellowed out as she jumped from the floor. Both parents jumped a mile high and voiced their surprise; her mother screamed shortly; her father yelping gruffly.

"Danielle! How long have you been sitting there?" her mommy asked.

"Just for a little while," Danielle replied with a sheepish grin on her face. She ran over to her daddy and he lifted her up onto the high bed with ease. She kissed him on the cheek and whispered, "Morning, Daddy."

"Hi, Baby," he responded and kissed her back on the forehead. She snuggled up against his chest and looked back to her mom.

"Well, don't you look pretty!" her mother exclaimed, noticing how Danielle was dressed. "Thank you for getting ready so early!" she added, trying to hint to her husband to rise from the bed.

"Oh, Kathy, for Pete's Sake! I'm getting up." This from Tom before throwing his legs over the side. Kathleen smiled with satisfaction and took Danielle with her to wake up her son, Scott.

The family of four had their Luv pick-up loaded in 40 minutes and were off for the church-going scene. This was one of the many outings the family took at least once a week and they enjoyed it.

They sat hand in hand, in the fourth pew from the front, watching and listening to the minister's long sermon. At 11:30, an hour after it started, the preacher announced the dismissal of the children for Children's Church. Danni loved this! She walked quickly to the back of the church and bolted into a run once she hit the door to outside. In Children's Church they did all sorts of fun things. Kid things. Singing the funny songs with the hand motions was her favorite. Stories came next. The youth pastor told a lot of stories that were much more interesting than the minister in the big church.

The hour went by too quickly for Danni Clarence. When she saw her mommy walk into the small classroom to pick her up, a short feeling of disappointment crossed her young mind. That was before she remembered that she got to go to Grandma's house for Sunday dinner. She ran to her mother and hugged her around the waist happily. They walked to the car, arm in arm.

"Where's Grandma?" Danni asked her daddy, who was waiting for them at the pick-up.

"She's still in the church, Honey," he replied.

"I wanna go with her. Can I?" she asked quickly. She often went from church to her grandparent's house in their car and her parents didn't object. She ran off in her Sunday dress to find her grandmother as the rest of her family went home to change.

When the old Buick pulled up into the carport of her grandparent's home, Danni's heart sank. Suddenly she wished she had stayed with her mommy and daddy. A sick feeling came over her stomach and she cringed back into her seat. Sitting in front of the house were her aunt and uncle and their two kids, Cindy and Jerry. Danni hated Jerry. He was mean, and bad. She slowly got out of the car and quickly grabbed hold of her grandma's hand. She watched the other family intently as they walked across the lawn to meet them at the door. Danni squeezed the hand she was holding absent mindedly and her grandmother smiled down at her lovingly. 'If only she knew,' Danni's innocent mind thought, seemingly older than her five years.

The Clarence troop arrived minutes later and Danni clung to her mother's side, following her everywhere, except into the bathroom, where she waited patiently right outside the door. Danni loved dinners away from home with her grandparents, but wished the other family, who was intruding in her opinion, would go away. Especially Jerry.

Dinner was served soon after everyone was settled in the environment and they all sat down to eat. The ham dinner was Danni's favorite, but for some reason she wasn't hungry. She picked at her food, keeping one eye at all times on Jerry. He ignored her completely which made her happy. Maybe he'd leave her alone today. After dinner was over, Danni asked to be excused so she could go play. She was set free and walked over to her brother and asked, "Wanna go outside?"

"No," he responded, "I'm gonna watch the game with everybody." Scott wasn't interested in football, Danni knew, but she also felt his need to be part of the men's clan. He liked the excitement of his father, grandfather, and uncle yelling at the TV and throwing popcorn around the room. She was disappointed never-the-less. It was always a lot more fun on the tire swing outside with someone to push her. She headed for the back door by herself, picking up her teddy bear, 'Beary', off the sofa on the way, and went out into the warm afternoon air. She set Beary into the swing and twisted the rope around and around, tightening it up, and then let it go to watch it spin faster and faster, sending the stuffed animal into the air and on the ground ten feet away. Danni giggled and ran to retrieve her friend to do it again. As she picked up her only protection off the ground and wiped off his coat, Jerry came into the backyard. Smiling at her, he walked over and picked her up to give her a hug, dropping Beary in the process. He squeezed too tight. It wasn't a cousin-to-cousin hug. It felt yucky and Danni wanted out of those bumpy arms. She wiggled and squirmed until he finally let her down. She backed away quickly and looked up at the ugly giant. He was only thirteen, but to her little five year only body, he looked huge. He had greasy blond hair, think brown glasses, and weird red bumps that covered his face. Her stomach tightened.

He stepped toward her and smiled again. "Do you want me to push you on the swing?" he asked.

'NO!!' her mind screamed, 'I WANT YOU TO GO AWAY!!' But she didn't say that. She stared at his unbrushed, brace covered teeth and grimaced. "I guess," she answered quietly. To her disgust, he picked her up again and carried her to the swing. The welcoming rubber of the tire felt cool and loving around her small body and she clung to it with desperation. How she hated this. Jerry grabbed the swing and pushed as hard as he could, sending her dangerously high into the sky. She held on, frightened, but even more afraid of what would happen if she asked to get off. She endured the ride until he got tired of pushing and stopped suddenly. She closed her eyes and prayed silently to that God person that the youth pastor was always talking about. It didn't help. Jerry spun her around to face him and he grinned with those gross teeth again. He licked his lips thoughtfully and then picked her up out of the swing. To her dismay, he began to tickle her. She screamed, but that only made him laugh and tickle harder, which hurt. She shut up. He took her to the side of the house and as the tears started to stream down her face and as she stared helplessly at Beary lying face down in the grass 30 feet away by the swing, Jerry's tickling turned to groping. Danni cried and begged to be let go, but Jerry's sick mind would not allow his ears to hear her. He turned her upside down and held on to both of her ankles. Danni pulled on the grass to pull herself free, but only managed to rip it out of the earth. The hem on her pretty white dress hung around her red hair and against the grass, staining it ruthlessly. She screamed and cried and clawed at the ground as her horrible cousin's handmade its way up her inner thigh. Why was this happening to her? She hated this, hated her brother for not coming out with her, hated her mother and father for not putting a stop to it, even though she had never told them, hated, for the first time, having dinner at this no-longer glorious home, and most of all, she hated Jerry. She closed her eyes momentarily and felt like she was going to throw up, going limp in this ogre's grasp, until his gruff hand grabbed her most private part and rubbed roughly. Danni kicked, with all her strength, all her anger, all her disgust, and got

herself free of this awful embrace. She scrambled to her feet and ran to Beary. She picked him up quickly and shot into the house, not looking back until the sliding glass doors were shut behind her. She turned around and saw Jerry sitting smugly in the swing, with that evil, ugly grin on his face, looking at her and beckoning with one finger for her to return. Danni spun on her heel and ran to her daddy's lap. He hugged her lightly as he watched the men on TV crash into each other, and Danni clutched her best friend, Beary, to her chest, his fuzzy fur being the most comforting feeling she knew of after one of Jerry's episodes. This had been the worst.

Danni sat in the warmth of her father's embrace and swore to herself, the best a five year old can, never to be alone with her cousin again. Little did she know that she would never be able to get away from him; he would always follow her, come looking for her wherever she was, and she wouldn't be able to get away. She was just a little girl, but she realized at that moment, that her demented cousin would haunt her dreams and thoughts for the rest of her life. She wondered, innocent and scared, why this was happening to her, not understanding yet that it would only get worse.

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### Frogs In My Eyes

by Aaron Danielson

Bob staggered from the bar into the cool night air. He stood on the sidewalk leaning against a lamp post. It was cold and uncomfortable against his back. He pulled up his sleeve and tried to determine the time, but the flickering glow of the street light and his drunken state made it impossible for him to decipher the black mass of numbers which seemed to be arranged in some alien fashion of the almost white face of the watch. He let his arm fall to his side and forced himself off the lamp post. He stood for a moment looking at the clear night sky with its many stars. The sky took on the look of a giant cloak covered in millions of tiny sparkling white jewels. He had never seen the sky like this before, so beautiful. Not one cloud disturbed the brilliant night sky. The cool air flowing through the trees and against his face soothed his troubled mind.

Bob was awakened from his trance by a passing car honking its horn, with its passengers chanting and howling obscenities at him (which he could not interpret) as they drove by. Bob didn't care. He just smiled and waved. He could care less what people thought. He had lost his job three days ago and had spent every one of those days walking to the same bar and only going home to sleep. Bob let his body rest and regain its balance, and when he did he started his long walk home.

His shoes were killing his feet. With every step they seemed to become tighter and tighter. He walked for what seemed miles when something broke through the silence of the still night air. It startled him somewhat. Was it the sound of frogs? It sounded like millions of frogs far off in the distance. But as he started to try to discover from which direction the sound was coming, he heard another frog; this one was much closer. It sounded like it could have been sitting on his shoulder speaking its strange language in his ear. As he looked behind him in the center of the sidewalk there sat a fairly large frog staring at him. Its dark black eyes seemed to be fixed on him. Bob thought nothing of it, turned and continued his slow march to his house. But the thing that greatly disturbed him was that this frog was following him. Bob laughed to himself because this was the first time he had ever been stalked by a frog. That thought of this made him chuckle even more. He crossed the street and stumbled up to his front door. He fumbled through his pockets trying to find the location of his keys. Finally he held the keys in his hand. He opened the door and entered the warm dark house. But as he turned to shut the door there sitting on his welcome mat was the frog. He quickly slammed the door.

Bob leaned against the hard wood door with a sigh. His house was dark. He flipped the switch on the wall and the short hallway was flooded with the white glow of the light. He strolled down the hall, across the dark living room, and sat down in his favorite chair. He sank into the soft cushions and his thoughts with a quiet cozy comfort. The quiet tick of the clock soothed his tired mind. He stared at the white wall which held a painting of a great forest. His eyes slowly closed out the world around him and his mind drifted into the great forest that looked so beautiful trapped forever on that single piece of canvas.

Bob could feel the wind in his dream. Oh, how wonderful the wind sounded and the majestic trees flowing with the breeze. But the wind and trees were suddenly drowned out by a large croak. His dream was gone, he slowly opened his eyes to the darkness around and then he heard another croak. He let his head fall forward and there, sitting on his lap was that horrid frog. It sat staring at him. Its smooth, shiny dark green skin looked so soft

as it took in a breath. It had massive dark black eyes that seemed to look right through him. Bob jumped from his chair letting the frog fall to the floor with a loud thump.

"Stupid frog," Bob mumbled as he kicked and stomped at the retreating frog. But something caught his ear: the sound of more frogs. That's when he saw the small dark shadows moving across his yard. Suddenly the frogs started jumping at the windows, smashing their bodies against the hard glass. The croaking of the frogs was growing louder. Then he saw them, scattered throughout the room. He glanced at the now blood stained window as more frogs threw themselves against it. He then noticed that they were coming out of his fireplace, falling down the chimney, looking like small green aliens falling from the sky. Bob looked towards the kitchen and noticed that the frogs were coming in through the small dog door, they were coming out of the heating ducts and they come toppling down the stairs like tiny green balls.

Bob didn't know what to think or do. Then one jumped on his leg and more jumped on his arms. He began flailing his arms and swatting on the many frogs clinging to his body like wads of chewed up gum. He couldn't get them off his body. He started to lift his hands to his ears to try and shut out the awful sounds of these frogs, but as he lifted his hand and looked at them they were no longer his hands. They were green with three fat round fingers that looked like they had been stuffed with marshmallows. He started feeling dizzy. He put his hands over his eyes, but his hands fell upon eyes that weren't his own. His eyes had changed; they felt like big round balls protruding from his head, and his head also felt different it was much larger and flatter.

Bob couldn't stand the thought that tortured his mind. Had he turned into a frog? He had to find out if what he thought happened really did? He tried to take a step, but fell on his face crushing the many frogs that littered his floor, like toys in a child's room. He couldn't walk, his legs had changed. He tried desperately to pull himself back onto his feet by grabbing at the chair but his short green arms proved to be fairly useless for this task. Bob waited with horror, but only a horrid rattling croak escaped his throat.

He lay sprawled on the ground for some time, desperately flailing his arms and legs, trying to move his now strange body. Finally, after his long struggle, he found the muscles in his legs that shot him forward like a bullet from the barrel of a gun. But when he landed, he planted his head firmly into the floor; he had forgotten to catch himself with his strange new arms. Bob scrambled forward to the stairs. He had to make it to the bathroom to see himself in the mirror. The thought of seeing himself this way made him queasy, but there was a faint glimmer of excitement also.

Bob stumbled up the stairs. How strange it felt to be unable to move his body like a normal person but to move it like a frog. Finally reaching the top of the stairs he hopped towards the bathroom. Bob tried pushing the door open with his hand but that proved to be slightly difficult, so he found himself pushing the door open with his large green head.

As his pudgy finger reached up and clicked on the light, Bob gasped with horror for his fear had come true; he was now a frog. A frog the size of a normal man. How could this have happened? Millions of questions raced through his mind. His heart pounded against his ribs as if at any moment it would leap from his chest. What would he do? He screamed, or rather he croaked and dashed from the bright light of the bathroom into the dimly lit hall. He hurried for the stairs in a frenzy of panic and confusion. Still not quite familiar with his new body, he threw himself down the stairs, tumbling and turning until he came to a halt at the bottom of the stairs where there were now frogs everywhere. He could no longer see the interior of his home. His body ached and he found it even harder to move because of the pain.

He tried to carefully make his way to the door without crushing the multitude of frogs that littered his path. With every movement he heard the death croak and the familiar squish of frogs under his massive body. When he finally reached the door he couldn't make his hands work on the smooth round doorknob. He started making strange croaking screams that caused him to become more disgusted at his situation. He let his grip fall from the knob and scrambled through the mass of frogs and hurled his body through the large bay window into the dark cool night. The grass on his hands and feet felt good. The cool air felt nice on his new body even though the cuts across his back from the glass stung badly. He darted across the yard finally able to take full leaps. It was a wonderful feeling to jump in such a way. He saw the hedge to his front yard and decided instantly to jump it. He took a great leap and cleared it with ease but as he landed in the street, he heard the screeching of breaks and saw the blinding lights of a car as his head was crushed by the bumper. Poor Bob was killed instantly.

"Oh my lord!" screamed the woman in the car. Her husband, a tall, wiry man with blond hair jumped from the car and rushed to where Bob lay bleeding on the ground. "Oh god, what have I done?" moaned the man.



Lights came on throughout the neighborhood. People slowly emerged from their homes to see the man standing over their neighbor in the street.

“Someone call 911,” screamed the man. People slowly came closer to see their dead neighbor.

“What happened?” asked a little old woman.

“Yeah, what did happen?” asked another.

“Well, he just kinda dove over the hedge and landed all crouched down on all fours like a frog or something!” replied the man.

The ambulance came rolling up the street with its wailing siren and flashing lights that illuminated the whole neighborhood. Behind the ambulance came a police car. The police officer began asking his questions as they slid the dead body of Bob into the back of the ambulance and drove off into the night. The neighbors, grief-stricken and shocked, slowly crept back to their homes. The police left and so did the man and his wife. The neighborhood was quiet and still except for the familiar sound of a frog croaking as it made its way down the street towards the park where a man was walking home with a newspaper under his arm and a dark black brief case held firmly in his other hand. Just another night of working late at the office, until he noticed that he was being followed by a frog.

“How strange,” he thought. “I’m being followed by a frog. Oh well.” He gave a slight laugh and kept walking.

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### Déjà Vu: The End (?)

by Austin Rich

The large building at 1600 Pennsylvania Avenue looked almost like Mt. Everest compared to the almost insignificant man approaching it. When Jerry Fields finally reached the front door, he felt almost ignorant as to what to do (after all, what do you do when you are on the porch of The White House?). After almost a full minute of hesitation, Jerry finally chose to knock on the door. Five minutes later Jerry was still waiting. Apparently, no one heard him knock. Well, what should he do? He could go right in. After all, he was told to come here (well, actually he was told that he starts work today, but doing what could be helpful). After another full minute of hesitation, he opened the door.

And three seconds later he was surrounded by secret service men.

\* \* \* \* \*

Buzzz. “Yes?”

“Mr. President, a man by the name of Jerry Fields claims that he was told to come here at the request of a White House staff member. The security team was on him after he tried to just walk right in. Should we ship him to the Feds?”

There was a two second pause of thoughtful silence, and a quiet mumble that sounded like someone trying to say something, but one could never be sure.

“No. By some odd fluke, he is supposed to be here. You can, if you wish, send him in now. However, I would like proper procedure explained to him at a later date.”

“Uh, sir?”

“Yes?”

“He says that two of his friends bringing in necessary lab equipment can’t get into the building because they don’t have the right clearance. Should we let them in?”

“Yes. But do complete background checks first, and send a team to check the equipment thoroughly before bringing it in.”

“Thank you.”

\* \* \* \* \*

“Jerry, Jerry, Jerry, Jer-er-er-er-y. Don’t you know that the best way to bring unnecessary attention to one’s self is to appear as if you are trying to break into the White House?”

"Shut up Déjà. I've had a bad day as it is. It appears that a full body cavity search entails a lot more than I thought it did."

"Will you two shut up?" interjected the President. "I've had a hard enough time keeping a lid on your friend Mr. Vu here with his extracurricular activities which seem to include letting illegal alcohol and women in classified areas, and these suits and passes were even more difficult to obtain. Now just shut up 'til we get there."

Silence filled the remainder of the trip with the possible exception of the sounds made when making hand gestures is concerned. Eventually they made it to the Oval Office, the only room that was probably soundproof.

"Now," started the nearly flawlessly dressed President, "As of now I'm on the brink of having you both locked up for life if it weren't for a certain contract your friend Déjà made me sign, and unless I have some kind of reasonable explanation as to what is going on I just might risk getting shot with that gun you're so eager to flaunt." This caught Déjà's attention. Obviously the President was a little more tenacious than he had thought. Déjà put the gun in his conveniently-located holster.

"Well," started Jerry, "last night I got a call that said I started work today. I assumed it was from here, and that my old job was back. I started to get ready when I received a follow up call from your staff members explaining that my position had been reinstated. I called some of my friends who had been behind my trying to get my job back, they started to haul my equipment, and, just to be safe, came here to clarify exactly what happened." Jerry turned to Déjà and said, "So, I guess you were successful."

"Was there any doubt? By the way, we have a little \$200,000,000 dollar debt to discuss later."

"Excuse me," interrupted the President. "Do you mean to tell me that you, Déjà Vu, mercenary for hire, were hired to perform a government coup by a lowly scientist who wanted his job back? It doesn't make sense."

"You're telling me. Why do you think I charged what I did."

"Only \$200,000,000?" was the Presidents only remark.

Shaking his head as if to get that thought out of his head, the President continued, "That's beside the point. Why didn't you go through the proper channels? I mean, if you had brought up valid reasons you just might have..."

"NO!" screamed Jerry. "I tried that and no one would listen. I figured that if I talked to Mr. Vu here I could get my job back, he would get some money, and no one is the worse for wear. Pardon me for doing it rather bluntly."

The President sat and thought for quite a while. Then he said, "Jerry, you can leave. Tell the first person you see that you need to go to the lab, President's orders. Show them this," the President handed Jerry a small card, "this will be your proof. If you don't mind I'd like to speak to Mr. Vu alone."

Jerry started to leave, and then said, "I really appreciate everything you've done, both of you, and if I can do anything for either of you..."

"Just leave!" they both said, simultaneously. Jerry left.

There was a good five seconds before the President said anything. In that time, Déjà sat down in a chair, and was expecting to get some kind of, "What were you thinking?" lecture.

"Déjà. You realize that there is probably more to this entire incident than you and I know. You're probably a master of hidden motifs, why do you think he hired you?"

This question threw Déjà. He wasn't expected to be approached frankly and with death threats.

"Probably wants to try to sabotage the government. Maybe kill some people. Or maybe he was hired to hire me to get him back in for any number of political reasons. My money's on the sabotage. That's what I would do." Déjà had a feeling that the President had other motifs for asking that question, but he wasn't going to argue that point.

"And what about you? Why did you take the job?"

"You want the truth? It wasn't for the money."

"Then why?"

"I wanted to see if I could do it."

The President sat in thought for a few more seconds. "Well, you realize the next logical step is to go against my word and turn you in."

"Yes." Déjà Vu had no reason to think otherwise.

"Is that what you want me to do?"

"If I were in your shoes, it's what I would do."

The President sat in thought a little longer.

"Here." He handed Déjà a little card. "This will get you past all the security in this building. However, in exactly 52 hours you become public enemy number one. The F.B.I. will be after you, the whole enchilada, so to speak. I am obligated, you know."

Déjà began to add that to his list of blessings now numbering at about twelve. "You realize I could use the information you just gave me as blackmail and get you impeached?"

"What information?" The President smiled.

Déjà Vu got ready to leave. As he got to the door he said, "By the way. You've got my vote next term if you want it."

"Don't bother," he said rather blatantly. "I'm not going to run. By the looks of things, your business looks a lot more profitable and entertaining."

As Déjà Vu left he had the really bizarre feeling that he would be seeing the President again in the near future.

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April 28th  
Hadley's Woods

*Part I*  
Memoirs of Jacob Hadley

*Thursday, April 28th, 1842*  
*Midnight*

"My name is Jacob Hadley. I am 28 years old, and I am in the first group to try to colonize this area. I lay awake, thinking about what we did this day. Today we built our first building and it was my responsibility to stay here keeping guard of our supplies. It rained today, and so we put our supplies inside the new building. The rest of our group is sleeping in their tents. I have the second watch, and at 5:00 I turn the watch over to..."

What was that? I thought I saw a shadow move inside the shed. If it was another animal sniffing around the food again, I'd get in major trouble. I decided to check it out.

When I entered the shed, I had a feeling of uneasiness wash over me. But if we lost even more flour or coffee, we'd be even more miserable than before. I didn't drink coffee, but our leader would have my hide if anything was ruined during my watch. Time to look inside. I took my torch inside and held it up to look around.

Nothing was there.

I looked around everywhere. That was strange. I swore I saw something. Maybe it escaped through a hole and ran off into the woods. What could it been? Then I heard a cracking behind me. I turned around just as something hit me on the head and knocked me unconscious.

The rest of the camp awoke to the sound of something breaking, as if a tree fell nearby. As someone pulled back a flap on the tent, they gave a shout of excitement. Others appeared from their tents now, and as they looked at what the man was gaping at, they gasped in astonishment.

There, where the building had stood, was a twisted heap of splintered debris. It had somehow collapsed on itself, the man who had been guarding it, Jacob Hadley, was dead.

Jacob Hadley was buried the next day. They rebuilt the building, making sure this time it was secure. Since he was the first to die in this area, they built the graveyard around his grave.

In a respect for the dead, they decided to name the forest after Jacob--Hadley's Woods.

*Part II*  
Memoirs of Elizabeth Hadley

*Tuesday, April 28th, 1887*  
*5:00 PM*

"My name is Elizabeth Hadley. I am 24 years old and am the only schoolteacher in this community. I sit here, eating dinner, thinking of what we have done in the last six months. We built a new church and turned the

old one into a school. This is also my home, and every morning, I wake up at dawn to ring the bell that awakens everybody in the community..."

What was that? Outside my window, I thought I saw someone peering in. It was probably some of my schoolboys, soaping my windows again. I will have to punish them, maybe slap their hands with a ruler for the third time.

As I stepped outside, a feeling of uneasiness washed over me. But I couldn't let my feelings get in the way of discipline. Suppose they got away with it this time? They would continue to do it until they were properly punished. It was time to look. Cautiously, I turned the corner.

No one was there.

That was funny. I could have sworn I had seen somebody. Where could those boys have disappeared to? Maybe they ran off into the woods. I heard something behind me, and I turned around just as something came down upon me. I fell into unconsciousness.

The people of the village awoke late the next day. What happened to the bell? They sent a young schoolboy up the road to the schoolhouse. Minutes later they heard a scream. The boy ran back, and tried to utter what he had seen, but could not. The people of the town rushed up to see what he had seen. They gasped in horror at the sight that beheld them. There, at the foot of the steps, lay the mangled body of the schoolteacher.

Elizabeth Hadley was buried the next day. The townsfolk hunted down the rabid horse that had trampled her and killed it. In the graveyard, next to her Grandfather, in the clearing in Hadley's Woods, lay the tombstone of Elizabeth Hadley.

### *Part III*

#### Memoirs of Carrie Hadley

*Saturday, April 28th, 1961  
Noon*

"My name is Carrie Hadley. I am 20 years old, and I am the maid for the Embersons. I sit here, eating lunch, thinking of what jobs I have had in the last six months. I have been a cook, a delivery woman, a secretary, and now a maid. I just can't seem to keep a job. But now, I think I can keep this one. I know how to cook, clean, light fires..."

What was that? Out of the corner of my eye, I thought I saw movement in the dining room. The master and mistress were in their home, and this was my wing of it. They usually didn't come here, unless I did something wrong, or if they needed me for something. Even then, they usually rang me on the phone. They considered it a bother to walk all this way. I decided to check it out.

As I walked into the dining room, a wave of uneasiness washed over me. But if they needed something, I'd need to be ready. I straightened my hat in the mirror and walked around the corner.

They weren't there.

Puzzled, I looked around the room. I then noticed that one of the windows was opened. Then, I realized it might have been a thief. He could have thought no one was here, came in, heard me coming, and ran away into the woods before I could stop him. I would have to tell the Embersons. As I was about to turn around when I heard a crash. I rushed over to see one of the paintings on the floor. As I spun around to see what happened, something hit me over the head and I was knocked unconscious.

The Embersons woke up to a cold room. Infuriated, Mr. Emberson rang Carrie on the phone, supposing she had overslept again. She would have to be properly punished, maybe fired. When she didn't answer the phone, he grew madder. She couldn't even be trusted to stay home in the mornings. His temper didn't cool at all when he had to walk all the way down to her wing of the house.

When he got there, though, he was horrified at what he saw. The room was ransacked, many expensive paintings and antiques gone. In the dining room her body lay, a bloody candlestick at her side.

Carrie Hadley was buried the next day. The thief, a common criminal, was hunted down and shot and killed while trying to escape. In the graveyard, next to four generations of Hadleys, in the clearing in Hadley's woods, lay the tombstone of Carrie Hadley.

*Part IV*  
A letter to Mike Hadley From Tim Hadley

*Thursday, April 28th, 1993  
5:00 AM*

“Dear Mike:

How are you doing? I’m doing great. Right now, I’m just sitting around, getting ready for school. One of the reasons I get up so early is because this is the only time I can forget that I’m fifteen, and just think. I’m an early riser, so I’m up half an hour before my sister. Since I get up first, I have to start the fire, heat up the cocoa water, etc. Oh well, that life. It’s not that hard, anyways. I’m glad that I’m not like my sisters. They spend half an hour on their hair. I’m not kidding. It takes them forever.

Wait a second, I thought I saw something up in the woods. You know, the ones behind my house? It might have been an injured animal. I guess I’d better go find it. Until later, this is Tim Hadley, signing off!”

After I put down the letter, I decided to get a cup of instant spiced cider. While the water was heating up, I got my school stuff ready, because when I got back, it would be time to go to school. The water was ready, and so as I drank the cider, I wrote a note to my mom telling her where I would be going.

Halfway through my cup, I heard a noise outside. It almost sounded like a dog whimpering. The animal must have been really hurt, so I grabbed my jacket and went outside.

After hopping the fence, I walked into the woods. I started to feel chilled, but I reasoned it was because there still was moist fog lying on the ground. As I got a little higher, I knew there would be less fog, and so I continued.

As the mist broke, I realized I didn’t hear anything anymore. That was when I started to feel uneasy. I just figured that it was because I had only came up here this early once before. I looked around for a sign of the animal.

Right over the ridge, I heard the noise again. I decided to follow. Stepping off the path, I walked over to the small pond. It wasn’t there, but I heard it again, up above the pond. I had never gone up there, but I knew the animal could be in pain.

As I walked up the slope, I almost felt a dread of going up the rest of the way. I still wanted to help the animal, and so I went the rest of the way up.

As I reached the top, I gaped in astonishment. At the top, I saw another pond, this one much larger. There were a couple of trees fallen in the pond, and after about five feet deep, they disappeared into the milky substance.

That was when I heard the noise. I whirled around, and I slipped. As I fell into the water, I thought to myself, “That was really stupid!”

Tim Hadley’s drowned body was buried the next day.

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**Job Opportunity**  
by Devin Miller

Chapter Two

Gradually he swam back to consciousness. His eyes snapped open and he took stock of his situation. He was in a hospital. or at least a room that looked like a hospital room, as his mind wouldn’t quite force itself to make a decision on insufficient evidence.

Then it all came back. He was Cedric Moore, an agent of the Bureau of Political Security, commonly known as PoliSec. He was one of five PoliSec agents to an Omega clearance, the highest there was, which allowed him to operate above the boundaries of the law.

He still didn’t know why he was in this room, and his nearest memory was of a week ago: anything that had happened within that week was a blank. Perhaps he had been captured by one of his enemies, but that didn’t make sense. He had been on a quiet assignment, all he had to do was discover what a major businessman had to do with the death of a senator. Cedric had even found that out. It was blackmail.

But when he tried to review what happened after that, he came up with a hole in his memory.

At that moment two men entered his room. Cedric immediately recognized the one on the right. He was Peter Bradford, Cedric's only superior at PoliSec, more commonly known by all without an Omega clearance as Gambit. Cedric, as with the other four agents in PoliSec with an Omega Clearance, also had a code name. His was Shadow. He thought they were all a little stupid, but the names were for their protection as well as identification.

"Good evening, Shadow. You are well, I trust?" Gambit asked.

"Yes sir, I'm fine except for a bit of amnesia," he replied.

The other man nodded. "You're lucky it's only amnesia. You were hit with two poisoned knives. By the time they reached you, the cell damage was nearly terminal. They had to place you in stasis and rush you here, to Excel, where we are much more equipped to deal with your injury. As it was, we couldn't save you, but Mr. Gambit," he stopped momentarily and glared at Gambit, "encouraged us to try harder. We had to perform a brain transplant. As luck would have it, you were one of the fortunate ones to have been cloned at birth." Seeing Cedric's alarmed glance, the doctor hurried, "A clone that was kept from achieving anything close to sentience. It was there for medical purposes, for example should you lose an arm, the clone would have one to spare. Well, you lost a body, and your brain dead brother had one he could give up," the doctor finished.

"I didn't know I had a clone. It sounds brutal though. I'm surprised it hasn't been outlawed." Cedric remarked.

"Well, it was." the doctor began, looking at Gambit curiously. "But due to some strange accident, your clone wound up at PoliSec Central, wherever that may be. I'm sure it was just a Simple oversight though."

Gambit smiled faintly, "I don't wish to sound rude, but I need to speak with Shadow in private."

"Sure. I'll be in the lounge if you need me," the doctor replied.

Cedric waited until the doctor had left before he spoke. "What's this business about my clone? How the hell did you find it, and why didn't you tell me?"

Gambit looked at Cedric coolly. "I didn't believe you needed to know. It was a rash decision on your father's part, as it was already illegal then. The accident happened before he was able to mention it to anyone, including your mother."

"Dammit, how do you know so much? I never told you my father died."

"It's my business to know. That's all beside the point though. I'm here for reasons other than to discuss your ancestry. I think you need a promotion."

"What? But why? And what would you promote me to"? Are you planning on retiring?"

"Don't be silly. You need the promotion. I feel you've grown stagnant with your present rank. You need something that poses a serious challenge. You don't remember how your last assignment turned out, do you?"

Cedric shook his head. "You had the evidence and you were bringing your man in. He made a mistake and had three assassins sent after him. You killed all three at the cost of his life and nearly your own. It was the final assassin that did it. He was a cyborg. He had an electronic brain and artificial limbs. He had faster reactions and thoughts, but you killed him nonetheless, although at the cost of your own life. Ever hear of the Saboteur Corps?" Gambit changed the subject.

"No. Should I have?" Cedric replied.

"No. The SabCorps, as they are commonly referred, is an organization much like our own except they operate on a much broader basis. Anything from quelling a rebellion to spending months or years infiltrating a corrupt business or government. They are bound by no laws except those laid down by the SabCorps. The next logical step would be for you to join the SabCorps." Gambit waited as Cedric thought about it. Years of working for PoliSec had made him get the habit of making decisions quickly. "I would like to know more about the SabCorps, but as of this moment it sounds like something I'll do."

"I thought as much. I brought a file on the SabCorps. Actually, it's the only one in existence. Don't lose it." Gambit handed Cedric an infodisc. "It's all on there. Everything you need to know. I'll be back tomorrow." With that, Gambit took his leave.

Cedric stared at the disc for a moment, then placed it in his minicomputer, a miniature computer measuring about fifteen centimeters by twenty-three centimeters, which he had found thoughtfully placed by someone on his bedside table.

As soon as he had put the infodisc into the minicomputer, the screen lit up, warning him that all the information he was about to see was highly confidential.

Cedric continued through the warning until he reached a menu. Several choices were presented to him, and Cedric chose to read the folder labeled Background.

"The Saboteur Corps was created by the Interstellar Peace Corporation shortly after the first interplanetary conflict (between Boruvia IV and Boruvia VIII), in 2034 P.D. It was made to insure peace between the planets.

Gradually, as time passed, the SabCorps sank deeper and deeper into obscurity and secrecy. Today, nearly a thousand years after it's inception, outside of the members, a bare handful know of it's existence. To date only twelve people know of the SabCorps."

That was all that was in the background file. Hierarchy and Politics was closest to the Background folder, so Cedric picked that.

"The Saboteur Corps has several ranks within it's organization. The lowest is the newest recruits, whose official rank is Trainee. Next up is the rank of Instructor, who, to be promoted to this position, must successfully complete whatever mission deigned best for them by their Instructor, then train additionally for a period of time to qualify as an Instructor.

At this point, the ranks divide. Depending on the Instructor's wishes, he/she may pursue one of several different courses in the three sections the SabCorps is divided into. The Research and Development Department (RDD), which comes up with the devices the SabCorps uses, in addition to other highly confidential things.

The Leadership branch is for those who want to become the commanding officers. This is an area of intense study. It can sometimes be bypassed by those who have spent a full career in the Field branch.

The Field branch is for those who want active service. It deals with all the agents who want active duty. The types of missions are highly varied however, so it is impossible to give a full explanation of them. They range from infiltration of a business or government to stopping a war, and everything in between."

After reading this, Cedric stopped. Was this what he wanted? He thought about his past few assignments. They had all been far from difficult. With the possible exception of his most recent assignment, in which he had gained a new body.

Setting the minicomp aside, he examined his body. Soft. It was soft all over. No calluses or muscle development. Cedric doubted he could lift more than thirty kilograms at this moment. But despite all that, he relished the idea of starting anew.

Picking up the minicomp, he chose the final folder, which was untitled. Words flashed onto the screen.

"Call me as soon as you have decided to join – Gambit."

Smiling faintly, Cedric contacted Gambit. He was there within five minutes.

"When do I start?" Cedric asked amiably.

"Immediately. For the SabCorps, there is no waiting. They want you bad. Real bad."

"Hold on a minute, I thought it was my decision?" Cedric protested, frowning.

"It was. It was your decision to join of your own volition. They would have convinced you to join if you had not decided to."

"I'm not sure I like the overtones of that."

"Too bad. Your cruiser is waiting. You are going to SabCorps Training Center. Your clothes are packed and are on the ship as well. Get your ass out of that bed, get dressed, and go down to the 'port.'

Cedric dressed quickly, finding out approximately what his limits were in his new body.

Gambit accompanied him down to the spaceport. "Your apartment had been sold, you won't be needing it for several years and the money will come in useful in the future. It's in your baggage. You will be equipped with new weaponry once you've completed training, but I've set your beloved Weatherby aside."

They reached the 'port. "Now get on the cruiser. I'll see you in a few years." Gambit shook his hand and slapped him on the back as Cedric departed. He didn't look back.

*To Be Continued...*

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## PRACTICAL APPLICATIONS OF INFINITY

by Damon Armitage

### Chapter Three

"IAN!" Derik yelled as he ran to the hole in the ground. A silent puff of dirt swirled languidly around the opening, but other than that nothing was to be seen. Peering into the opening, he saw a section of tunnel, with Ian standing there scratching his head and looking around.

It was about eight feet to the floor of the cavern, and Derik saw Ian was unhurt. Glancing around, He noticed that Ian had fallen through what appeared to be rotten logs covered by earth and rocks. Shards of broken pottery laid against the wall, and spear and arrow heads littered. the floor.

Derik, grab some branches and make some torches!" Ian said. Let's find out where this goes!"

Derik muttered something, then walked off to find suitable branches to use as torches. He returned a few minutes later, a bundle of sticks under his arm. He tossed them down the hole, then jumped in after Ian.

"These aren't the right size," Ian remarked.

"If you don't like them, get some of your own," Derik retorted. "There's a whole forest back there, and I'm sure there's some branches that meet your standards."

"Now what do we use to keep them burning?" Ian asked, ignoring the comment. "I'm sure you always carry a can of oil, right?"

"Actually, I just remembered that. I brought my flashlight." Ian groaned.

Derik fished his flashlight from the bottom of his pack and shined it down the corridor, which led north at a downward angle. They then started to move cautiously along the passage, examining every inch of the walls, floor and ceiling carefully. The cavern smelled musty, and a fine layer of dust had settled on everything, covering the stone floor. The air was heavy and difficult to breathe. It was about twenty feet down the corridor that a couple of discoveries were made by the two explorers. First, that the tunnel ended. Second...

"Look!" Ian said in a hoarse whisper.

Ian swung his flashlight around to the right.

"The other way, stupid!" Ian said.

Ian pivoted the beam the other way, and the light fell on an ancient skeleton propped against the wall, a crumbling stone knife lodged in its ribcage. The skull lolled to one side, and the hollow eye sockets stared unseeing into nothing.

Chills ran up Derik's spine, and he broke into a cold sweat. He soon recovered however, and looked at the skeleton more closely. He noticed that it too was covered in a layer of dust. Somehow the knowledge that the skeleton had been there for a long time comforted them. After they had examined it thoroughly, they lost interest in it and examined the wall in front of them.

The wall was stone and had been worn smooth, but whether by human hands or by nature was impossible to tell. They searched for a way through it for about half an hour, but were unsuccessful.

"I give up," said Ian. He turned his back to the wall and slid down it to the ground. Bored, he sifted his hand through the thick layer of dust. Not watching what his hands were doing, he unknowingly uncovered some ancient Indian paintings and drawings on the stone, faded from time.

"Hey!" Derik exclaimed, shining his light on the drawings.

"Hey what?" said Ian, still not noticing the artwork. Following Derik's glance, he looked down and finally saw the prints which covered the ground on which he sat. Ian and Derik began to brush aside the dust and examine the drawings, but most of them were too faded to be seen.

"Why did this have to be a dead end?" Derik asked. Frustrated, Derik pounded on the base of the wall. There was a barely audible click, but this was nearly drowned out by a string of colorful metaphors from Derik as he rubbed his bruised fist.

"That was a smart thing to do," Ian started to say. Just then he noticed a small edge of discolored stone around the door that hadn't been there before.

"Derik, get over here and check this out!" Ian said.

Derik stopped hopping around and making up new words long enough to see what Ian was talking about.

"Here, help me push on this," Ian said.

Surprisingly enough Derik did this without comment, and the two pushed with all their strength on the door. They couldn't feel it move at first, but it began to grudgingly slide across the stone floor with a sound similar to fingernails being drawn across a chalkboard. It made Ian's skin crawl, but they finally managed to force the stone far enough to get around it.

"Before we go any further, How much food do we have?" Ian asked.

"Lessee... I brought Cheetos, three candy bars, a two liter of Coke and a couple cans of chili," Derik said.

"Did you bring a can opener?" Ian's answer was silence. "This is epic." Derik looked just about ready to scream. Ian smiled and pulled an object out of his pocket. "Relax, genius," he said. "There's one on my pocket knife."

## Chapter Four

The two friends began to walk down the descending corridor. Realizing that they would need some way to find their way back, about every fifty feet they would take a stone and mark an on the wall. The tunnel soon leveled out and began to twist and turn. Ian and Derik soon lost all sense of direction. They began to encounter branch corridors, but the main corridor continued on, so they followed it. They continued on for what seemed like an interminable period.

"How long have we been walking?" Ian asked.

Derik glanced at his glow-in-the-dark Swatch. "About half an hour," he replied.

The air grew more chill, and the darkness crept close. Derik switched off the flashlight to conserve battery power, and they tied themselves together with a length of rope. Each walked down either side of the tunnel, so that they could detect side passages. The tunnel remained about ten feet wide, and they made steady progress. Toward what they didn't know, but they were definitely making progress.

After another incredible time span (perhaps forty-five minutes) they simultaneously lost contact with the wall. Derik found his flashlight and flicked it on. Light was reflected back from about fifty different directions as it fell on a huge cavern filled with huge quartz crystals. The two marveled at their discovery. They kept the flashlight on as they passed through the cavern, since it was immensely wide. They also wanted to admire the crystals. The tunnel soon narrowed again, and they once more continued on in darkness.

"This silence is driving me crazy," said Ian after a time. "Let's sing or something."

Ian launched into the chorus of a camp song he had learned in the sixth grade. His ears were immediately assailed from every direction by hideous echoes, and that was the end of that idea.

"I'd be careful," Derik advised. "You never know when the ceiling might come tumbling down if you make too much noise." Ian was very quiet after that.

The two soon heard the sound of flowing water. It was coming from off to the left along a side passage, and they decided to investigate. Derik was the first to discover the stream.

"AAIGGH!" he said, and judging by the preceding splash this could be roughly translated as don't-fall-in-the-water-it's-freezing-cold! He completely forgot and ignored his earlier advice to be quiet to avoid a cave-in, but as much noise as he was making it was doubtful he would've noticed if Mt. Everest had fallen on top of him.

"Hey, Derik!" Ian called. "Could you do that again? I missed it the first time!"

Derik used some words Ian didn't know, but they seemed to refer to his sexual orientation and a questioning of the legitimacy of his lineage. He hated it when Derik insulted him in foreign languages.

The stream turned out to be about a foot deep in the middle, and when Derik flicked his flashlight on they saw that the corridor they were following crossed the stream and continued on ahead.

Ian leaped across the narrow current easily, while Derik sloshed his way out onto the bank. They decided to rest here since there was a water source and Derik needed to dry off. They had nothing to build a fire with, so Derik changed into the spare clothes he had brought and laid his wet ones on the ground nearby. His backpack was still relatively dry, so the food and his extra clothes were all right. Ian had a thought.

"Derik."

"What?"

"Let's see if there's any fish in that stream."

Derik tossed him the flashlight. Ian caught it and walked over to the edge of the water, shining the light on it. There in the shallow ripples laid a number of medium-sized fish. Their skin was translucent and their eyes were huge. They shied away from the light. Ian had another thought.

"Derik."

"What?"

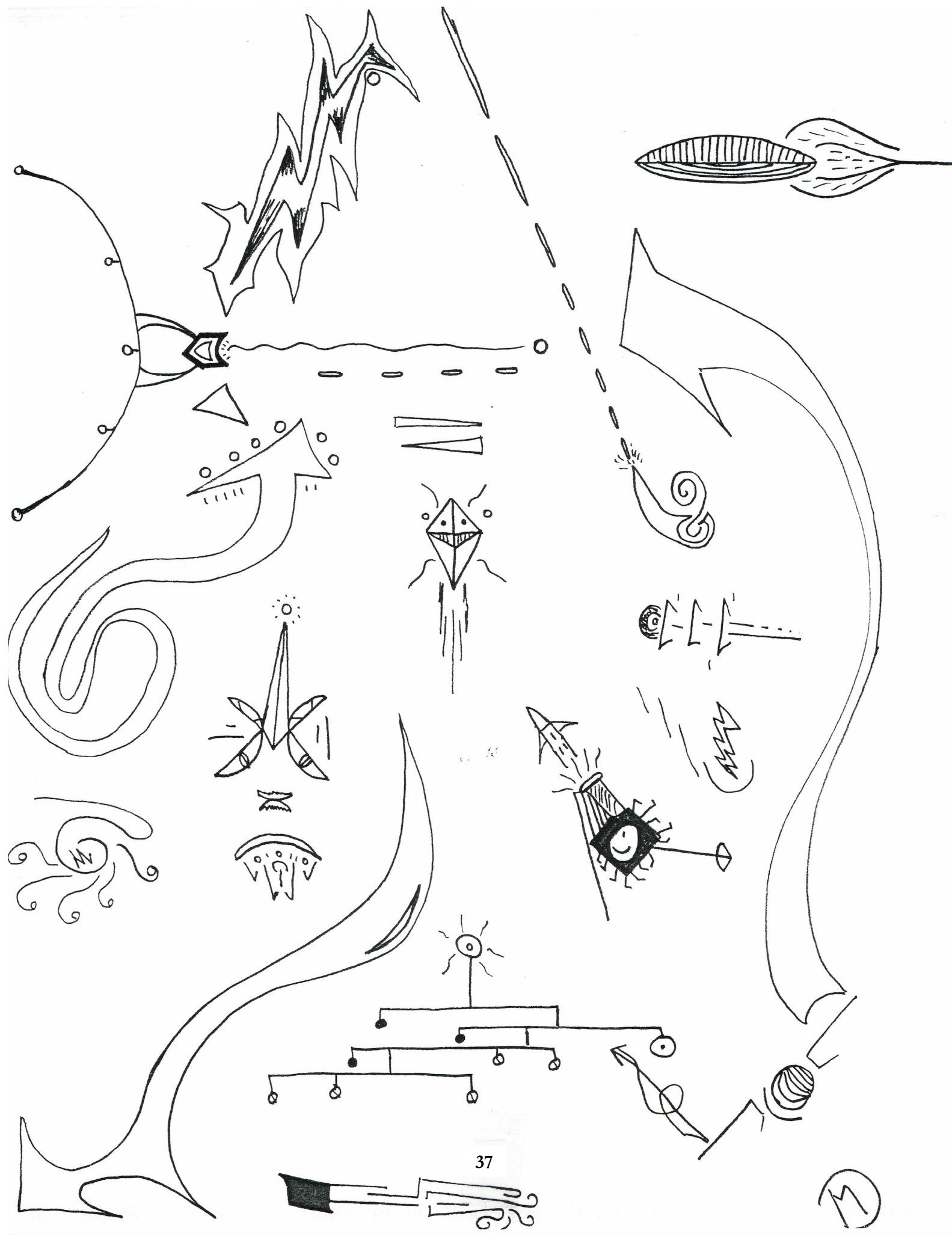
"There's fish in here."

"Great! Now we have more food!"

"Derik."

"What?" Derik said, irritated.

"We don't have any way to cook them."



Derik looked at Ian for a moment, then picked up a rock and threw it at him.

*To Be Continued...*

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## **The Lilipad Incident, Three Miles From Civilization, Right After Lunch**

by Austin Rich

Once upon a time a small tadpole in a large lake asked his mother why he existed.

However, since his mother was incapable of answering the question, she said, "Son, there are some things we are meant to know. And if we come across something we can't figure out, we ignore it. That way, we don't have much to worry about."

"But mom," he said. "How will we ever evolve? How will our race advance, grow, develop technology, and improve our lifestyles? How can we better our standard of living?"

His mother just smiled. "You've been listening to the fishermen, haven't you?"

"Yes," he said shyly. He was embarrassed now.

"Don't worry about those kinds of things. Obviously, any race that chooses to take one of our kind from the water in an attempt to gain status isn't all it's cracked up to be."

"But, what about evolution?"

"Son, look where it got them." She pointed towards the people standing on the dock with fishing poles. One of them pulled a large fish from the water with his pole. He immediately called for his friends, and they all came running, congratulating him. They proceeded to help gut the fish.

The tadpole turned in disgust.

"Oeeeeew! I guess you're right mom."

With that, the tadpole went about his business of growing into a nice and healthy frog, who always warned his tadpoles to avoid humans at all costs, just like his mom told him.

The End

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## **Hate**

by Justin Anderson

As I was walking home from work with Larry the other day I saw a boy wearing the same hat & jacket as the boys who shot my son.

Denny was just walking to the park to play basketball when they shot him. Because Denny wore a black jacket and red shoes they thought he was a part of a rival gang and shot him. He didn't do anything to them, but they shot him just to impress their friends.

Larry saw me staring so he asked who that kid was. I said he was one of them. Larry just said, "If it was me I would have killed them all." What did he think he was doing, calling me a coward. I had to show him I wasn't. So I crossed the street and walked up behind the kid. I tapped his shoulder and when he turned around I drove my fist into the side of his face, sending his jerking body to the ground. That's when I let my anger get to me. I started kicking him. Then you guys came. So you see, Officer Davis, I couldn't let Larry think I was weak.

## **Art**

by Rob Villa and Nathan Cook

Art was a boy who couldn't stand school  
It made him sleep and when he slept he drooled  
He was picked on early until his high school career  
Now sorry old Art is a beer drinking queer

It all started back in grade number one  
He would sit at his desk and suck on his thumb  
Art had funky clothes and unmatching socks  
To make things worse he came down with the pox  
He missed two and half weeks of school  
and when he returned he continued to drool  
Only to have all the children make fun  
of that little kid who sucked on his thumb

Grade number two was pretty much the same  
he was the same nerdy kid with many a name  
From drool to fool from geek to freak  
no one ever heard that nerdy kid speak.  
Until grade six he had not a friend  
until his life started to bend

He grew tall over summer and stood at 6'1"  
He was active in sports and for him it was fun  
His dorky old clothes in what he outgrew  
He was dressed for success and he lived happy too  
He was friends with the jocks and studs of the school  
He took tons of No-Doz so he would no longer drool  
His freshman year stood above the rest  
Girls thought he was studly cause he had hair on his chest  
He went to a party each weekend that year  
Everyday as a sophomore he was craving a beer  
His junior year started to decline  
He was tired of girls cause they would constantly whine  
"I'm sick of girls," some heard Art say  
and that's when poor Art made the choice to be gay  
The worst of all grades was his senior year  
Because poor old Art was a drunken ol' queer  
Art couldn't go to college he was dumb by far  
So he lived the rest. of his life inside a gay bar.

**.UnChanged**  
by Robbie Wolfard  
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I painted a picture  
Yesterday  
It was about a house  
Overlooking the sea  
The penguins  
Throwing themselves at the  
Rocks  
As I slowly go insane  
From lack of love  
And my love will surely grow  
If you would only let it  
Then you'd understand  
What I'm talking about.

## Childhood

by Austin Rich

When I turned eighteen I got a really nice computer as the central gift from my mother. She also gave me a nice necklace and a card, but the computer was the main present. It was a 386 IBM computer. A very nice VGA monitor and it came with two main programs, Windows and Word Perfect. It also had a few shareware games on it, but I only played two of them with any amount of frequency, and they were slightly simple in concept anyway.

However, as nice as that computer was, and as much as I used it, It never really had a chance compared to the computer I owned when I was a child.

When I was rather young, my dad assumed that I was going to like to hunt like he used to. He grew up in a very small town, almost in the woods, near a lake, and he, his brothers and his father hunted regularly. I guess it was a family tradition, because the stories I heard from my grandfather were, more or less, about hunting with his father.

Well, one day my father decided that it was time I learned to shoot a gun, and he told me of the event in plenty of time to prepare my childlike mind for the experience. *A real gun!* I remember thinking. I couldn't wait. It was almost mystic in the way it was described. He was going to take me to the Firing Range outside our small town, where it was okay to shoot at targets.

The day we were supposed to go to the Firing Range, we scoured our home for old milk jugs, metal cans, large glass jars, and large pieces of cardboard that we marked a large coordinate graph on so we could see if we were aiming correctly. We loaded it all into my father's very large truck, and he himself loaded the rifles I was supposed to shoot.

That day my dad took me to a place I had never been to in my life. Normally when we go for a drive, we never really leave very far from town, and when we do it is to go to places that I knew a little bit from previous fishing trips we would take. But we drove past all of those places that I had already been to, and eventually my dad made a left turn on an old gravel road that went on for about two or three hundred yards. At the end of the road it opened up to a sort of gravel parking lot, and in front of that was our 'Firing Range'.

In all actuality, it was not much of a Firing Range. A log quite a distance off with debris spread out around it was the extent of our targets, and what we brought with us was what we were to shoot at primarily, with the exception of a log to the side that was standing up that had (obviously) been shot at many times, and had a few targets here and there.

My two brothers had come along too, and though they were also going to shoot the guns, they were not going to get to have as many chances as their far superior older brother was, and because of this I felt proud, and was not tempted to rub it in as most older brothers would.

We carefully set up our targets, and after we did so we walked away from the log to a good distance away, where my father proceeded to tell us everything he knew about shooting a gun, stressing the points of safety. After he was sure that we were ready to shoot the rifles, he carefully unzipped the gun covers, and removed the long black beauties.

I believe he shot the gun first, and then he allowed me to shoot the gun.

The weight of the gun was more than I had anticipated, but I was in no danger of dropping it, or of letting it get out of my control. I gripped it firmly like my father showed me, and went through all the procedures that he had gone through before firing. When I felt I was ready to fire, I tried. But I couldn't. It was as if the sheer power of the weapon was too great for my child's mind to handle, and I just couldn't shoot the gun at all.

After a few moments, I began to acknowledge that I was being watched, and that if I didn't fire the gun, I would no longer be suitable of the honor I had earlier. I would lose all the pride that I had in being the first of my father's son's, the oldest of my father's sons, to fire a rifle.

I aimed at a milk jug and pulled the trigger.

If I remember correctly, I think I missed.

The day proceeded in much the same fashion, and even though the slight bruise I had received on my shoulder would go away, I think it was more than that that made me want to stop shooting the gun. However, I think I did one or two more times. If I remember accurately, my youngest brother only fired once.

Soon, my younger brother became preoccupied with the clay pigeons that were strewn about the ground to the right of the Firing range, all of them broken, that were probably from some person shooing at them off of the cliff a little farther to the right. I think my other brother joined him eventually, and then we all did at one point or

another. My younger brother's biggest find was both halves of a single clay pigeon. I believe he kept it for quite some time.

However, my discovery was much more interesting.

During the many treks between where we fired the guns and the log at which we fired, I saw many things lying on the ground that were obviously litter. However, one piece of it was very, very interesting. It was, in all actuality, a one quarter inch thick piece of plastic with as many holes in it as there could be, that at one time in the past held bullets for some type of gun or another. However, I saw a bright yellow piece of something that was by far something more interesting than anything I had seen that day, and as far as I was concerned, I had to have it. I picked it up immediately.

I didn't know it then, but I had found my computer.

That day when we went home, I carried with me my treasure, making sure it could never get broken. It was special, and I had to treat it that way. When I got home, I put it in my room in a place I was sure it would never get lost or broken. I was very excited about my find, and often used it in the pretend games I would play with my imaginary friends.

Eventually, I got ahold of some duct tape, and out of curiosity as to what my toy would look like coated in the material, I wrapped it completely in pieces of duct tape. In doing this, I then created a gray piece of plastic that, in my mind, resembled a small computer. And from then on, that is what it was in my games.

I cut some extra pieces of duct tape and placed them in varying places on the object to more and more resemble a computer. I even pretended that I didn't have to be with the computer to use it just as long as I had a piece of duct tape with me (it was then that I took to wearing a small piece of duct tape on the underside of the bill of my baseball hats).

With that computer I became a famous research scientist from the future performing some top secret experiments for the government. I was hunted by spies from the future who did not want my project to succeed, and I often pretended that I was no longer a part of my family, and was merely pretending to be their son. I traded places with the artificial mind in my computer regularly, and at one point a small, miniaturized robot was injected inside of me where the computer's mind could operate, making the duct tape obsolete (this was obviously inspired by Fantastic Voyage by Isaac Asimov, and book I had read and loved around this time).

My computer could do anything. I could time travel. I could teleport. I could communicate with the future, and always have a friend to talk to. Always.

I still don't even know or remember how, but I lost my computer. I don't think lost is the correct word, because one day I woke up and realized that I no longer had that wondrous computer. Like most children, I was only angry for a while, and did spend a good deal of time looking for it. I never did find it, but that didn't stop me. I still had the duct tape. I still had the miniaturized robot. I still had my imagination! I still had my childhood!

And then, one day, I woke up to realize I had lost those to.

I didn't bother me at the time. Life went on. I was no longer a child and I no longer needed those toys and games to play with. I had real friends and school to deal with. And eventually I found that I didn't need my computer anymore, and I became a little more concerned with getting a real one.

I forgot completely about that computer.

A few days ago I caught myself talking to my girlfriend about her clothes, in particular the jacket she was wearing. I asked her where she had gotten it. She told me it was a magic jacket, and that with it she could fly. I told her that someday we should go flying, jokingly. She told me that she couldn't fly anymore. When I asked her why, she said, "Because I grew up."

It was then that, for the first time in a very long time that I remembered my childhood computer, and for the first time in my life I realized that the most tragic event in my life had occurred and I didn't even notice it at the time.

I had lost my childhood.

I don't think I'll be able to get over that one for quite a while.

## Psychos, Anonymous

by Austin Rich

### Part I.

I stared deeply into his eyes, and he into mine. From here on out things would become a complicated chess game; my move would be made, then his, then mine, then his. He would tease me with his ace in the hole as I would with mine. I would continue the game even though he had a handicap; he didn't know what I had in store for him. My only problem was, I didn't know what he had in store for me.

He sat calmly at the table in his apartment room, thumbing through stacks of papers and notes and books. He currently had in his hand the Last Will And Testament Of Paul Logan, and above his hand protruding away from his hand was a silk blue green sleeve. Connected to the sleeve was the remainder of a blue green silk shirt that covered the length of his chest and other arm. Around one wrist he wore a watch, and the cuff was unbuttoned on that sleeve as well. His head, no longer centered on the Will, was turned looking at me. He saw an old black trench coat that enveloped me like the night outside his window. My shoes were barely visible from underneath my coat, and my face was barely noticeable due to my black hat that left my head in shadows. He knew nothing of me, and I knew little more than that of him. I knew who he was, and what he had done. He killed a man, and for that he must die.

"Can I help you?" he inquired. He sounded nervous, but I could see his hand creeping down his desk toward his desk drawer.

"Yes, you can." My voice was cold and sounded very soft. I did that purposely, to try to scare him. But he continued to move his hand. "I'd like to ask you some questions, and I'd like you to answer them. And I'd also like you to tell me the truth *when* you answer them." I tilted my black hat back to reveal the large scar on my left cheek that had been recently inflicted upon me during some business I had to take care of in northern China. Rather messy, but necessary.

"Some questions? About what? And how'd you get in here? And besides, I don't have to answer any questions that I don't want to." He said that part very definitely, and I could tell this one would be a tenacious one. He showed no immediate signs of fear, so I would have to try harder.

"The subject matter of the questions involves last Tuesday evening. I got in here though the front door; locks are no problem for me. And in response to your last statement, you will find answering my questions will be less hassle for you, and me." While saying that, I moved over to him slowly, and placed my right hand on his desk as I put my left hand in my pocket. From the angle he was sitting at, he could see my red eyes.

He backed away from the desk. He went and sat down on his bed. He did a very ineffective job of hiding the knife he removed from his desk, but I didn't mind anyway. He said, "Go ahead and ask you questions, but I think introductions are in order. My name's Justin."

"Yes, I know. Justin Logan. You can call me James. I've been looking for you for a while, Justin. Thought I'd never find you. But I did. Finally." I turned my back on him for a moment, to try to force his hand early. I was successful. He came hurtling toward my back, but I heard him before he got to me. I had enough time to turn around and grab his hand, the one with the knife in it. The power Justin put into his leap forced us up against the wall of his apartment. He reached for my throat, but I intercepted his hand and we began to wrestle against the wall of his apartment. I gained some leverage by putting one of my legs across the back of his legs, and pushing him back. He fell fast, and hard. I managed to pin him down. The knife was still a problem, so I clinched my hand around his wrist harder, to force him to drop the knife. No luck. I was concentrating so hard on the knife that he managed to turn me over, and I was on my back. I was losing my leverage. Time to regain it.

"If you can hear me and care to listen, I would check my coat pocket before you do anything irrational. If you do so you will notice a small box, with knobs on it. That box is monitoring my vital signs. When I reach dead, it blows up. I thought it was a rather explosive idea myself." I laughed a maniacal laugh. He took the bait.

He got up off me, the knife pointing right at my throat. I continued to lie on the ground. He reached into my coat pocket, and a small box with several knobs on it was there. A pulse meter was active at regular intervals, and another meter on the side rose up every time I inhaled, and down when I exhaled. He looked at it, rather puzzled.

"How do I know this really works?" he asked.

"How do you know it doesn't?"

He returned to his desk and put the knife away as he tossed the box back to me. "So what do you want to know, James?"

It was time. He sat in his desk chair several feet from his desk. I walked up to him and sat on his desk.

"Hey, watch where you're sitting! Those are important papers you're sitting on!"

I removed a rather large handgun from the inside of my coat. This man had rather annoyed me, and I felt that I just might have to go against my own rules and just get it over with. Of course I stopped myself after I saw his face. I reveled in sadistic glee. He was ready to do anything and everything.

"Under the circumstanced, Justin, I think I can sit wherever the hell I please. Now you have tried my patience, little man, and I'm getting very annoyed. Please don't make things any more difficult than then already are."

He cringed. He looked only at the gun. I think this one was the .45 Magnum, I couldn't tell from the way I was holding it. "What do you want to know, James?" He sounded a little more frightened than before, but it wasn't the kind of fear I wanted. The fear he was giving off was the kind that said, "I don't believe I can defeat this man in a fight if need be." The fear I wanted was, "Oh my god! Please don't kill me! I'll do anything!" Oh well, a little more work on my part.

"I'd like to know what you were doing last Tuesday."

"Tuesday? I don't recall exactly **what** I was doing that day. Tuesday you say? Last Tuesday? Hmmmmmm."

I pushed the gun closer toward him, and moved my hat to put my whole face in view. He probably saw a middle-aged man with heavy stubble, lots of scars, and red eyes. I was glaring at him with a satanic look in my face. I said, "Well, I recall what happened last Tuesday. On the corner outside the pool hall. Do you remember that, Justin? The streetlight shining brightly on the two men, and you in the apartment building across the street? Do you remember, Justin?"

He was now beginning to look very bad. He knew I was right, he knew I had seen what he did that Tuesday, and he knew the outcome of this evening would not be good. He looked this time at me, not exactly sure what to say. He did eventually say, "So, how much did you see?"

"It's not exactly important as to what I saw, but it's very important as to what you saw. Why did you do it? Why did you purposely take the life of another human? Why?" But then I had lost all control. I was shouting loudly, and moving hysterically. "I want to hear the whole story, Justin. Every little gory detail from you as to why you did it and what happened. I want to make sure you saw exactly what I saw. And I want you to tell it, now!" I put the gun away. I had done my job, he was scared enough to tell without the aid of props. I sat down in a chair I dragged from the corner of the room. I looked at him, and pulled off my hat. My black, messy hair was unimportant, but in comparison to him I was downright grotesque. He had light brown hair, and blue eyes. His apartment was clean and well decorated. He himself looked as if he was ready to go on a date of some kind, but I had checked his schedule. It turns out he dressed like that all the time. I laughed. Even the rich guys can kill.

"Where should I begin?"

"How about at the part where you first saw the two men at the corner?"

## Part II.

The evening began as most evenings do. The sun went down. The clouds danced with the same beautiful colors it always does when the sun sets. The moon began to shine, and the stars winked back into existence as they do every night. There was nothing particularly different or unique about his evening. The street corner next to the pool hall needed the artificial lighting to stay rather visible, but other than that not much else had occurred that was different. The pool hall closed at 10:00 P.M. as it had every night before, and like it would every night after. Things were pretty much the way they normally were. Even the drug transaction on the corner next to the pool hall was the same as all the ones before it. With one small exception.

The two men came to each other within a matter of minutes. The first man, dressed in a black leather jacket and biking pants stood leaning against the lamppost at about two in the morning. He lit a cigarette and began to smoke it, rapidly. By the time he was done, another man showed up. He stood just outside the light coming from the street lamp, and motioned to the man in leather. He went over to him, and there was an exchange made. The man in leather went back to the lamp post and let another cigarette.

At that time two things happened. A car went down the street, and was shot at four times. The driver stopped the car, and rolled toward the guy in leather at the lamp post. "Hey, get down. Now!" Together they

crept into the shadows of the pool hall building, but couldn't find a way to enter. Another shot was fired, and a low scream was let out. The biker stood up and fired a small handgun in the direction the bullets were coming. Two of them landed in the windowsill of the apartment building across the street. Five more shots were fired at the guy in leather. One of them hit him in the neck. It entered so fast that he didn't fall immediately. That gave the other four bullets time to enter his body in the chest three times, and the shoulder once. The blood splattered against the pavement with that sound that paint makes when it hits a wall. Eventually the man fell to the ground, and a small stream of blood flowed down the curb of the street, right into the grating that led to the sewage pipes.

The gun retracted from outside the apartment building, a long one at that, and twenty minutes later a man left the apartment building and went to the car. He was smiling at what he had done. He was proud. He drove home.

### Part III.

"You still haven't answered all of my questions, Justin."

"What else is there to answer? I killed both of them, I admit it. They deserved to die anyway."

I looked at him again. He looked back. Our eyes connected for just a split second, long enough for us to both feel the hatred the other had in them. I said, "Why did they deserve to die?"

"Why? That's not even an issue any more. They are both scum, they deserved to die. End of discussion."

He would have to be difficult. "Why did they deserve to die Justin?" I said it in a slightly louder, and in a colder voice.

He turned his head sharply and buried it in his shoulder. I had touched a nerve. It had something to do with them being drug dealers, I knew it. I looked at him again, and he brought his head around. "It's because of what they do, isn't it? They're drug dealers, that's why, isn't it?" I was very insinuative.

"And so what if it is!" He began to yell very loudly. "It isn't any of your concern if it is anyway, so just leave me alone, okay?"

That was it. I was certain.

"Listen, Justin, I have a certain quest in my life too. So you had better damn well tell me now before I carry out that quest." I looked at him, and he could tell I was serious.

"Fine, what good is it gonna do you anyway?" I didn't answer. "As you could see, my father was well off. Ran a good business, made lots of money. I was to inherit it all when he died. One night a bunch of punks, drug addicts, came, broke into his house, and robbed him blind. He woke up during all the commotion, and they panicked. One of them planted a knife in his neck, the others shot him more times than the ballistics officer could count. He was dead, and all because of a couple of punk drugies who wanted five more minutes of euphoria. It's not fair. He didn't deserve to die! They are the ones that do. Those vile scumballs that will stoop to any level for five grams of coke. It's not fair, okay?"

I looked at him. He was crying. I could see the anguish, the pain, the suffering. He was a man with a purpose in his life; to avenge his father. I respected this man. Of all the men I've met in my life, this one was the most worthy of me ignoring him, and continuing without doing this guy. But it was very clear to me, even though I respected this man and knew he had a worthy cause, that he couldn't possibly know what I was going through. The pain, the anger, the suffering.

"Touching little story, Justin. Very much so." I turned my back on him to contemplate my actions. I was so torn. "Too bad you'll never say it again." I turned and fired the gun I had removed while turned. I hit dead center at what was supposed to be Justin's head. Instead I hit his lamp. Beautiful one, too.

He had somehow managed to leave the bedroom without me seeing. I held the gun out in front of me and began to circle the room. This could be a problem. He's almost as determined as I am, and I just might have trouble killing him. I proceeded down the hall, past the empty bathroom and closet, and into an opening where his front door, the lock busted, swung slightly open like I had left it. I glanced to the right and saw a living room area. Big mistake on my part.

I felt the cold steel first as it punctured my left shoulder blade. I screamed in pain. I rotated and fired wildly. I hit his right leg as he ducked to the left of the refrigerator. I couldn't see him at all.

The pain in my back was intense, but I blocked most of it out. I sat on the floor and scooted back into the hall. I carefully removed the knife from my back. I told myself that it wouldn't hurt that much, and that it would all be over in a second. Obviously I'm not a good liar, I screamed in agony again. I looked at the knife with my

own blood on it. It was a heavy coating too, and I knew I would be in serious trouble if I didn't treat it soon. I tried to black out the pain, and checked the situation.

I was in the hall, and about fifteen feet away in the kitchen was a man as desperate to protect his own life as I was to take it. I wasn't that afraid of death; I somehow had a feeling that I wasn't going to die for quite some time. At least I was going to live long enough to make a difference. I examined my gun; it had two bullets in it. Then I was on my own. Simple math told me I had fired three bullets in the kitchen, since I could only fit nine bullets into this gun and I had fired it three times before coming here. I felt it was time to move. I stood up. Then my right leg collapsed under me, and I was back on the ground.

I reached down and felt intense pain coming quickly. I seemed to forget all about my shoulder, and concentrated solely on my leg now. When did it give out on me? I felt around, and then screamed in utter torment. I pulled my hand up and saw more of my own blood. I turned around. Just was sitting there with a large gun, and a silencer on it.

Justin laughed this time. He did seem to have the advantage. "James, James James James. You obviously forgot about the dining room behind the kitchen, that connects to this hallway. You must be more careful in these situations."

He had me pinned. Not much I could do. I had been so careless not checking the rest of the house before talking to him. No matter, I would soon be regretting it.

"James, ol' buddy. Why? Why come waltzing in here with the intent of killing me? I can't understand it. It just doesn't make sense. Could you explain it to me?"

"I have my reasons."

He made the most fatal error of his life right then. I had been concentrating on his legs, and since I was now turned around, I thought I could try to trip him and pin him down before he could fire his gun. But he actually turned around! He was babbling about something, but I didn't hear him. I leapt to my foot (I folded my right leg back to hurting it again.) I fired two shots, once in his right leg and once in his left leg, right above his calf. He fell like a rock. With him now on his back, his legs underneath him, he couldn't get a decent shot in. He finished off his entire round and managed only to graze my shoulder. I had ducked back down, disorienting him. I was in intense pain, but I crawled on top of him and pinned his arms down.

"Justin, I want you to know something before you die."

He didn't say anything. He was trying to break my hold.

"The other men I kill, they have almost no purpose in life. They kill because they are afraid of what will happen to them if they don't, or there was no other option. Some have reasons, like insanity or some derangement. But they are wild and crazy. They kill for some poor excuse like, 'I was abused as a child.' I can't buy that. But you, like some others I have met, are decent killers. You kill for a reason, and you are systematic about it and you don't go crazy. I respect you for that."

He stopped struggling. He looked at me. "Really? You respect my work?"

"Very much so."

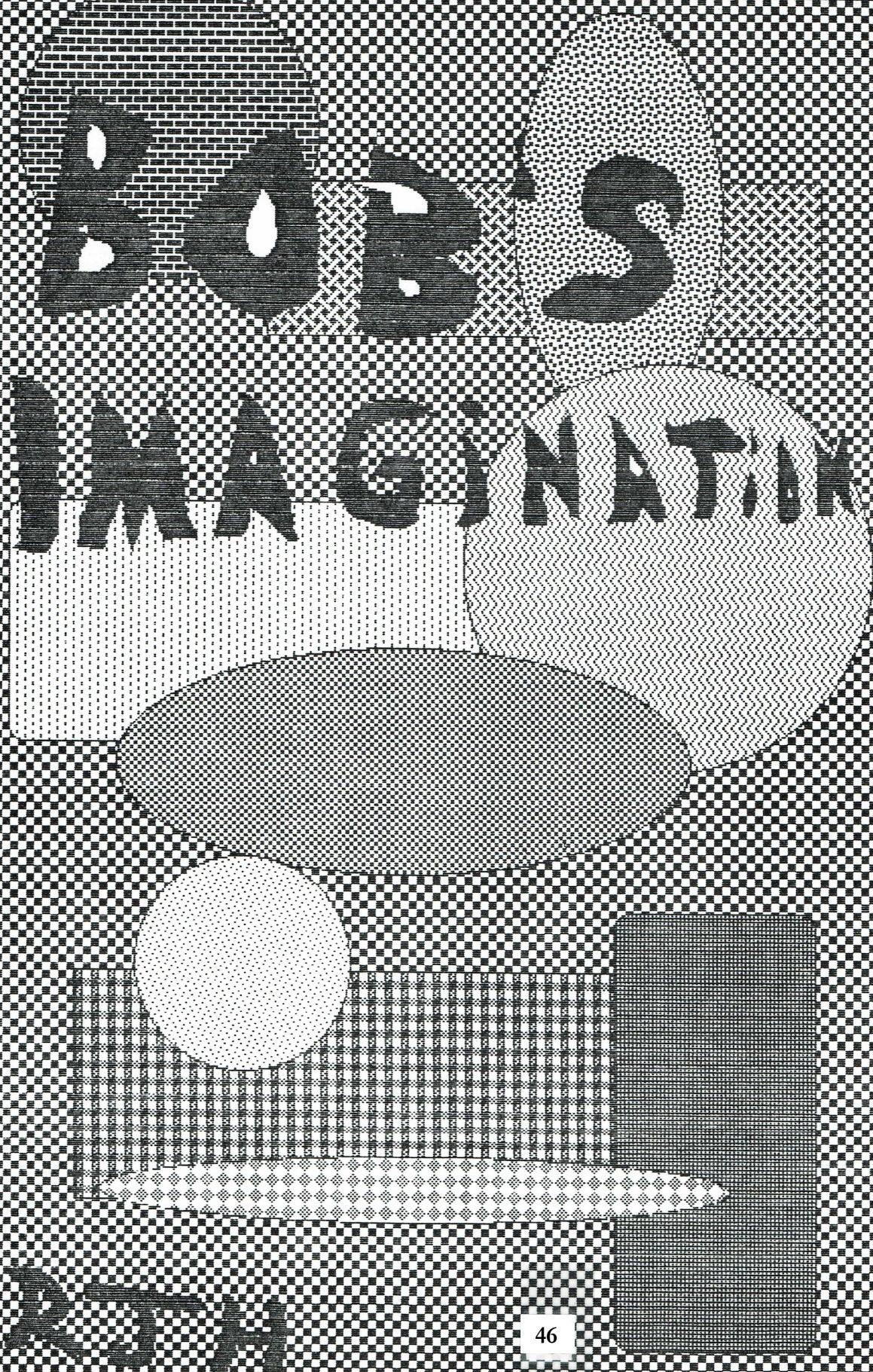
#### Part IV.

That night, Justin Logan died with a smile on his face. I thrust the knife he had stabbed me with into his rib cage twice. I think I ruptured a lung too. He spat some blood all over my coat. When I finally saw him die, I went to the couch in his apartment and crashed for a second. I thought about what I was going to say when I went to the hospital. I thought about Justin. Why did he change his name from Doug to Justin? As near as I could figure, he wanted to have the same name as his brother, who already had a record. At least my anonymity had remained: I went by an alias as well.

I decided not to repair my coat, and leave it as it is, in honor of Just... Doug Logan.

I also thought about what I do and why I do it. Is it my fault that my parents were mistaken for other people in the mob, and were killed by professional assassins? Is it my faults I was scarred for life? Is it my fault that I feel the need to kill people that kill others?

Is it?



### *Anonymous Cobort's Closing Note:*

I would like to leave you all with a quote. But first I would like to dedicate it. Though I am no god, I dedicate my quote to those who think they are, those who wish to suppress me, and anyone who doesn't like the person I really am. There are people who I know would just as soon drag me into the dirt and keep me there so that they stomp on me. There are people who I know would like to see me dead. I tell you this: you cannot kill all that is me nor can you kill all that is like any part of me.

"No one holds command over me. No man. No god. No Prince. What is a claim of age for ones who are immortal? What is a claim of power for ones who defy death? Call your damnable hunt. We shall see who I drag screaming to hell with me."

--Gunter Darin, Das Ungeheuer Darin

Rest In Peace

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### *Austin's Closing Note:*

As I look back at the first issue of the magazine I recall a time when all it was was a thought in my head. I remember my excitement and I remember the childlike expression that was on my face, like I had received a Christmas present that I had always wanted.

I also remember the nervous feeling I got when I first got the hard copy of the first issue and the feeling of, "Oh my god, it sucks. No one will like it," overcame me I soon overcame that feeling when everyone I talked to said that it was good.

As I look back at the second issue, I remember getting the same feeling, but it never left because for some reason I had already done the outstanding feat and people only wanted the magazine for the content now.

I didn't care, though. I coped with that and learned that the personal reward was what counted. I finally did it, and no one stood in my path.

When the third issue hit the scene, right after the first Annex, I was very proud of my work, as I was with all the other Annex's, and this issue. It just goes to show that even if there was no verbal praise, I was still getting satisfied with my work, and that made me happier, and that made the magazine better.

In the end, I got my praise. But there is one person in particular I would like to talk to directly for something he said to me that made me know, beyond a shadow of a doubt, that I was making the right impression. To you, that person dressed in a Country Western singer look, the one that sat several seats behind me on the bus, the one that got an entire group of prejudiced people started about my earring, I'd like to say this:

Thank you. Even though you have proved to me that there are still some assholes left that don't get the point, at least my individuality stung you to the point of intimidation.

Goodbye CGHS.

**The Following 71 Items Are Cleverly Disguised As Part Of The Art On The Back Cover Of This Magazine. However, Due To Xeroxing And Binding, Some Of Them Are Cut Off Around The Edges. Anything Else Your Mind Distinguishes As Real Is Probably Completely Un-Intentional (We Hope):**

Screaming Trees  
NIN (Written Twice)  
Ministry  
Pearl Jam  
Sex Pistols  
Dinosaur Jr.  
Psalm 69  
Erasure  
Yaz  
XTC  
L7  
TV II  
Wire Train  
Depeche Mode  
Vampire  
The Cure (Written Twice)  
Beastie Boys  
Alice In Chains  
Personal Jesus  
They Might Be Giants  
Soundgarden  
Edie Brickell And The New Bohemians  
Stone Temple Pilots  
Man In The Box  
Rosencrantz And Guildenstern Are Dead  
Advanced Dungeons And Dragons  
Haircut 100  
Led Zeppelin  
Love Song  
The Stand  
The Doors  
Iron Butterfly  
Thinner  
REM  
Head Like A Hole  
The Jesus And Mary Chain  
10,000 Maniacs  
Red Hot Chili Peppers  
Helmet  
U2  
Pixies  
King Missile  
Living Colour  
Butthole Surfers  
Dead Milkmen  
Monty Python Lives  
Camper Van Beethoven  
Siouxsie And The Banshees  
Sex Type Thing  
Love To Hate You  
Toad The Wet Sprocket  
Devo  
Friday I'm In Love  
Lush  
Beavis And Butthead  
Hi Mom  
Sunscream  
Unsung  
Belly  
The Sundays  
Run DMC  
Violent Playground  
D. O'Dorant  
Harriers Are Cool  
Duran Duran  
IT  
Oh L'Amour  
Time Enough For Love



